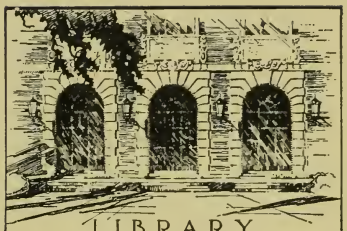

MOUNT ROYAL

A Novel

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET"

ETC. ETC. ETC.

In Three Volumes.

VOL. II.

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MOUNT ROYAL.

CHAPTER I.

"LET ME AND MY PASSIONATE LOVE GO BY."

That second week of July was not altogether peerless weather. It contained within the brief span of its seven days one of those sudden and withering changes which try humanity more than the hardest winter, with which ever Transatlantic weather-prophet threatened our island. The sultry heat of a tropical Tuesday was followed by the blighting east wind of a chilly Wednesday; and in the teeth of that keen east wind, blowing across the German Ocean, and gathering force among the Pentlands, Angus Hamleigh set forth from the cosy shelter of Hillside, upon a long day's salmon fishing.

His old kinswoman's health had considerably improved since his arrival; but she was not yet so

entirely restored to her normal condition as to be willing that he should go back to London. She pleaded with him for a few days more, and in order that the days should not hang heavily on his hands, she urged him to make the most of his Scottish holiday by enjoying a day or two's salmon fishing. The first floods, which did not usually begin till August, had already swollen the river, and the grilse and early autumn salmon were running up; according to Donald, the handy man who helped in the gardens, and who was a first-rate fisherman.

"There's all your ain tackle upstairs in one o' the presses," said the old lady; "ye'll just find it ready to your hand."

The offer was tempting—Angus had found the long summer days pass but slowly in house and garden—albeit there was a library of good old classics. He so longed to be hastening back to Christabel—found the hours so empty and joyless without her. He was an ardent fisherman—loving that leisurely face-to-face contemplation of Nature which goes with rod and line. The huntsman sees the landscape flash past him like a

dream of grey wintry beauty—it is no more to him than a picture in a gallery—he has rarely time to feel Nature's tranquil charms. Even when he must needs stand still for a while, he is devoured by impatience to be scampering off again, and to see the world in motion. But the angler has leisure to steep himself in the atmosphere of hill and streamlet —to take Nature's colours into his soul. Every angler ought to blossom into a landscape painter. But this salmon fishing was not altogether a dreamy and contemplative business. Quickness, presence of mind, and energetic action were needed at some stages of the sport. The moment came when Angus found his rod bending under the weight of a magnificent salmon, and when it seemed a toss up between landing his fish and being dragged under water by him.

"Jump in," cried Donald, excitedly, when the angler's line was nearly expended, "it's only up to your neck." So Angus jumped in, and followed the lightning-swift rush of the salmon down stream, and then, turning him after some difficulty, had to follow his prey up stream again, back to the original

pool, where he captured him, and broke the top of his eighteen-foot rod.

Angus clad himself thinly, because the almanack told him it was summer—he walked far and fast—overheated himself—waded for hours knee-deep in the river—his fishing-boots of three seasons ago far from watertight—ate nothing all day—and went back to Hillside at dusk, carrying the seeds of pneumonia under his oilskin jacket. Next day he contrived to crawl about the gardens, reading "Burton" in an idle desultory way that suited so desultory a book, longing for a letter from Christabel, and sorely tired of his Scottish seclusion. On the day after he was laid up with a sharp attack of inflammation of the lungs, attended by his aunt's experienced old doctor—a shrewd hard-headed Scotchman, contemporary with Simpson, Sibson, Fergusson—all the brightest lights in the Caledonian galaxy—and nursed by one of his aunt's old servants.

While he was in this condition there came a letter from Christabel, a long letter which he unfolded with eager trembling hands, looking for joy and comfort in its pages. But, as he read, his

pallid cheek flushed with angry feverish carmine, and his short hard breathing grew shorter and harder.

Yet the letter expressed only tenderness. In tenderest words his betrothed reminded him of past wrong-doing and urged upon him the duty of atonement. If this girl whom he had so passionately loved a little while ago was from society's standpoint unworthy to be his wife—it was he who had made her unworthiness—he who alone could redeem her from absolute shame and disgrace. "All the world knows that you wronged her, let all the world know that you are glad to make such poor amends as may be made for that wrong," wrote Christabel. "I forgive you all the sorrow you have brought upon me: it was in a great measure my own fault. I was too eager to link my life with yours. I almost thrust myself upon you. I will revere and honour you all the days of my life, if you will do right in this hard crisis of our fate. Knowing what I know I could never be happy as your wife: my soul would be wrung with jealous fears; I should never feel secure of your love;

my life would be one long self-torment. It is with this conviction that I tell you our engagement is ended, Angus, loving you with all my heart. I have not come hurriedly to this resolution. It is not of anybody's prompting. I have prayed to my God for guidance. I have questioned my own heart, and I believe that I have decided wisely and well. And so farewell, dear love. May God and your conscience inspire you to do right.

"Your ever constant friend,

"CHRISTABEL COURTENAY."

Angus Hamleigh's first impulse was anger Then came a softer feeling, and he saw all the nobleness of the womanly instinct that had prompted this letter: a good woman's profound pity for a fallen sister; an innocent woman's readiness to see only the poetical aspect of a guilty love; an unselfish woman's desire that right should be done, at any cost to herself.

"God bless her!" he murmured, and kissed the letter before he laid it under his pillow.

His next thought was to telegraph immediately to Christabel. He asked his nurse to bring him a

telegraph form and a pencil, and with a shaking hand began to write :—

"No! a thousand times no. I owe no allegiance to any one but to you. There can be no question of broken faith with the person of whom you write. I hold you to your promise."

Scarcely had his feeble fingers scrawled the lines than he tore up the paper.

"I will see the doctor first," he thought. "Am I a man to claim the fulfilment of a bright girl's promise of marriage? No, I'll get the doctor's verdict before I send her a word."

When the old family practitioner had finished his soundings and questionings, Angus asked him to stop for a few minutes longer.

"You say I'm better this afternoon, and that you'll get me over this bout," he said, "and I believe you. But I want you to go a little further and tell me what you think of my case from a general point of view."

"Humph," muttered the doctor, "it isn't easy to say what proportion of your scemptoms may be temporary, and what pairmenent; but ye've a

vairy shabby pair of lungs at this praisent writing. What's your family heestory ?"

"My father died of consumption at thirty."

"Humph! ainy other relative ?"

"My aunt, a girl of nineteen; my father's mother, at seven-and-twenty."

"Dear, dear, that's no vairy lively retrospaict. Is this your fairst attack of heemorrage ?"

"Not by three or four."

The good old doctor shook his head.

"Ye'll need to take extreme care of yourself," he said: "and ye'll no be for spending much of your life in thees country. Ye might do vairy weel in September and October at Rothsay or in the Isle of Arran, but I'd recommaind ye to winter in the South."

"Do you think I shall be a long-lived man ?"

"My dear sir, that'll depend on care and circumstances beyond human foresight. I couldn't conscientiously recommaind your life to an Insurance Office."

"Do you think that a man in my condition is justified in marrying ?"

"Do ye want a plain answer?"

"The plainest that you can give me."

"Then I tell you frankly that I think the marriage of a man with a marked consumptive tendency, like yours, is a crime—a crying sin, which is inexcusable in the face of modern science and modern enlightenment, and our advanced knowledge of the mainsprings of life and death. What, sir, can it be less than a crime to bring into this world children burdened with an hereditary curse, destined to a heritage of weakness and pain—bright young minds fettered by diseased bodies—born to perish untimely? Mr. Hamleigh, did ye ever read a book called 'Ecce Homo?'"

"Yes, it is a book of books. I know it by heart."

"Then ye'll may be remaimber the writer's summing up of practical Chreestianity as a seestem of ethics which in its ultimate perfection will result in the happiness of the human race—even that last enemy, Death, if not subdued, may be made to keep his distance, seemply by a due observance of natural laws—by an unselfish forethought and regard in

each member of the human species for the welfare of the multitude. The man who becomes the father of a race of puny children, can be no friend to humanity. He predooms future suffering to the innocent by a reckless indulgence of his own inclination in the present."

"Yes, I believe you are right," said Angus, with a despairing sigh. "It seems a hard thing for a man who loves, and is beloved by, the sweetest among women, to forego even a few brief years of perfect bliss, and go down lonely to the grave—to accept this doctrine of renunciation, and count himself as one dead in life. Yet a year ago I told myself pretty much what you have told me to-day. I was tempted from my resolve by a woman's loving devotion—and now—a crucial point has come—and I must decide whether to marry or not."

"If you love humanity better than you love yourself, ye'll die a bachelor," said the Scotchman, gravely, but with infinite pity in his shrewd old face; "ye've asked me for the truth, and I've geeven it ye. Truth is often hard."

Angus gave his thin hot hand to the doctor in

token of friendly feeling, and then silently turned his face to the wall, whereupon the doctor gently patted him upon the shoulder and left him.

Yes, it was hard. In the bright spring time, his health wondrously restored by that quiet restful winter on the shores of the Mediterranean, Angus had almost believed that he had given his enemy the slip—that Death's dominion over him was henceforth to be no more than over the common ruck of humanity, who, knowing not when or how the fatal lot may fall from the urn, drop into a habit of considering themselves immortal, and death a calamity of which one reads in the newspapers with only a kindly interest in other people's mortality. All through the gay London season he had been so utterly happy, so wonderfully well, that the insidious disease, which had declared itself in the past by so many unmistakable symptoms, seemed to have relaxed its grip upon him. He began to have faith in an advanced medical science —the power to cure maladies hitherto considered incurable. That long interval of languid empty days and nights of placid sleep—the heavy sweet-

ness of southern air breathing over fields of orange flowers and violets, February roses and carnations, had brought strength and healing. The foe had been baffled by the new care which his victim had taken of an existence that had suddenly become precious.

This was the hope that had buoyed up Angus Hamleigh's spirits all through the happy spring-time and summer which he had spent in the company of his betrothed. He had seen the physician who less than a year before had pronounced his sentence of doom, and the famous physician, taking the thing in the light-hearted way of a man for whom humanity is a collection of "cases," was jocose and congratulatory, full of wonder at his patient's restoration, and taking credit to himself for having recommended Hyères. And now the enemy had him by the throat. The foe, no longer insidiously hinting at his deadly meaning, held him in the fierce grip of pain and fever. Such an attack as this, following upon one summer day's imprudence, showed but too plainly by how frail a tie he clung to life—how brief and

how prone to malady must be the remnant of his days.

Before the post went out he re-read Christabel's letter, smiling mournfully as he read.

"Poor child!" he murmured to himself, "God bless her for her innocence—God bless her for her unselfish desire to do right. If she only knew the truth—but, better that she should be spared the knowledge of evil. What good end would it serve if I were to enter upon painful explanations?"

He had himself propped up with pillows, and wrote, in a hand which he strove to keep from shaking, the following lines:—

"Dearest! I accept your decree: not for the reasons which you allege, which are no reasons; but for other motives which it would pain me too much to explain. I have loved you, I do love you, better than my own joy or comfort, better than my own life: and it is simply and wholly on that account I can resign myself to say, let us in the future be friends—and friends only.

"Your ever affectionate

"ANGUS HAMLEIGH."

He was so much better next day as to be able to sit up for an hour or two in the afternoon; and during that time he wrote at length to Mrs. Tregonell, telling her of his illness, and of his conversation with the Scotch doctor, and the decision at which he had arrived on the strength of that medical opinion, and leaving her at liberty to tell Christabel as much, or as little of this, as she thought fit.

"I know you will do what is best for my darling's happiness," he said. "If I did not believe this renunciation a sacred duty, and the only means of saving her from infinite pain in the future, nothing that she or even you could say about my past follies would induce me to renounce her. I would fight that question to the uttermost. But the other fatal fact is not to be faced, except by a blind and cowardly selfishness which I dare not practise."

After this day, the invalid mended slowly, and old Miss MacPherson, his aunt, being soon quite restored, Mr. Hamleigh telegraphed to his valet to bring books and other necessaries from his

chambers in the Albany, and to meet him in the Isle of Arran, where he meant to vegetate for the next month or two, chartering a yacht of some kind, and living half on land and half on sea.

CHAPTER II.

"ALAS FOR ME THEN, MY GOOD DAYS ARE DONE."

ANGUS HAMLEIGH'S letter came upon Christabel like a torrent of cold water, as if that bright silvery arc which pierces the rock at St. Nectan's Kieve had struck upon her heart with its icy stream, and chilled it into stone. All through that long summer day upon which her letter must arrive at Hillside, she had lived in nervous expectation of a telegram expressing indignation, remonstrance, pleading, anger—a savage denial of her right to renounce her lover—to break her engagement. She had made up her mind in all good faith. She meant to go on to the bitter end, in the teeth of her lover's opposition, to complete her renunciation in favour of that frail creature who had so solemn a claim upon Angus Hamleigh's honour. She meant to fight this good fight—but she expected that the struggle would be hard. Oh, how long

and dismal those summer hours seemed, which she spent in her own room, trying to read, trying to comfort herself with saddest strains of classic melody, and always and through all listening for the telegraph boy's knock at the hall door, or for the sudden stopping of a hansom against the kerb, bringing home her lover to remonstrate in person, in defiance of all calculations of time and space.

There was no telegram. She had to wait nearly twenty-four hours for the slow transit of the mails from the high latitude of Inverness. And when she read Angus Hamleigh's letter—those few placid words which so quietly left her free to take her own way—her heart sank with a dull despair that was infinitely worse than the keen agonies of the last few days. The finality of that brief letter—the willingness to surrender her—the cold indifference, as it seemed, to her future fate—was the hardest blow of all. Too surely it comfirmed all those humiliating doubts which had tortured her since her discovery of that wretched past. He had never really cared for her. It was she who had forced him into an avowal of affection by her uncon-

scious revelation of love—she who, unmaidenly in her ignorance of life and mankind, had been the wooer rather than the wooed.

"Thank God that my pride and my duty helped me to decide," she said to herself: "what should I have done if I had married him and found out afterwards how weak a hold I had upon his heart—if he had told me one day that he had married me out of pity."

Christabel told Mrs. Tregonell she had written to Mr. Hamleigh—she spoke of him only as Mr. Hamleigh now—and had received his reply, and that all was now over between them.

"I want you to return his presents for me, Auntie," she said. "They are too valuable to be sent to his chambers while he is away—the diamond necklace which he gave me on my birthday—just like that one I saw on the stage—I suppose he thinks all women have exactly the same ideas and fancies—the books too—I will put them all together for you to return."

"He has given you a small library," said Mrs. Tregonell. "I will take the things in the carriage,

and see that they are properly delivered. Don't be afraid, darling. You shall have no trouble about them. My own dear girl—how brave and good you are—how wise too. Yes, Belle, I am convinced that you have chosen wisely," said the widow, with the glow of honest conviction, for the woof of self-interest is so cunningly interwoven with the warp of righteous feeling that very few of us can tell where the threads cross.

She drew her niece to her heart, and kissed her, and cried with her a little; and then said cheeringly, "And now tell me, darling, what you would like to do? We have ever so many engagements for this week and the next fortnight—but you know they have been made only for your sake, and if you don't care about them——"

"Care about them! Oh, Auntie, do you think I could go into society with this dull aching pain at my heart? I feel as if I should never care to see my fellow-creatures again—except you and Jessie."

"And Leonard," said the mother. "Poor Leonard, who would go through fire and water for you."

Christabel winced, feeling fretfully that she did

not want any one to go through fire and water; a kind of acrobatic performance continually being volunteered by people who would hesitate at the loan of five pounds.

"Where shall we go, dear? Would you not like to go abroad for the autumn—Switzerland, or Italy, for instance?" suggested Mrs. Tregonell, with an idea that three months on the Continent was a specific in such cases.

"No," said Christabel, shudderingly, remembering how Angus and his frail first love had been happy together in Italy—oh, those books, those books, with their passionate record of past joys, those burning lines from Byron and Heine, which expressed such a world of feeling in ten syllables—"No, I would ever so much rather go back to Mount Royal."

"My poor child, the place is so associated with Mr. Hamleigh. You would be thinking of him every hour of the day."

"I shall do that anywhere."

"Change of scene would be so much better for you—travelling—variety."

"Auntie, you are not strong enough to travel with comfort to yourself. I am not going to drag you about for a fanciful alleviation of my sorrow. The landscape may change but not the mind—I should think of—the past—just as much on Mont Blanc as on Willapark. No, dearest, let us go home; let me go back to the old, old life, as it was before I saw Mr. Hamleigh. Oh, what a child I was in those dear days, how happy, how happy."

She burst into tears, melted by the memory of those placid days, the first tears she had shed since she received her lover's answer.

"And you will be happy again, dear. Don't you remember that passage I read to you in 'The Caxtons' a few days ago, in which the wise tender-hearted father tells his son how small a space one great sorrow takes in a life, and how triumphantly the life soars on beyond it?"

"Yes, I remember; but I didn't believe him then, and I believe him still less now," answered Christabel, doggedly.

Major Bree called that afternoon, and found Mrs. Tregonell alone in the drawing-room.

"Where is Belle?" he asked.

"She has gone for a long country ride—I insisted upon it."

"You were quite right. She was looking as white as a ghost yesterday when I just caught a glimpse of her in the next room. She ran away like a guilty thing when she saw me. Well, has this cloud blown over? Is Hamleigh back?"

"No; Christabel's engagement is broken off. It has been a great blow, a severe trial; but now it is over I am glad: she never could have been happy with him."

"How do you know that?" asked the Major, sharply.

"I judge him by his antecedents. What could be expected from a man who had led that kind of life—a man who so grossly deceived her?"

"Deceived her? Did she ask him if he had ever been in love with an actress? Did she or you ever interrogate him as to his past life? Why you did not even question me, or I should have been obliged to tell you all I knew of his relations with Miss Mayne."

"You ought to have told me of your own accord. You should not have waited to be questioned," said Mrs. Tregonell, indignantly.

"Why should I stir dirty water? Do you suppose that every man who makes a good husband and lives happily with his wife has been spotless up to the hour of his marriage? There is a *Sturm und Drang* period in every man's life, depend upon it. Far better that the tempest should rage before marriage than after."

"I can't accept your philosophy, nor could Christabel. She took the business into her own hands, bravely, nobly. She has cancelled her engagement, and left Mr. Hamleigh free to make some kind of reparation to this actress person."

"Reparation!—to Stella Mayne? Why don't you know that she is the mistress of Colonel Luscomb, who has ruined his social and professional prospects for her sake. Do you mean to say that old harpy who gave you your information about Angus did not give you the epilogue to the play?"

"Not a word," said Mrs. Tregonell, considerably dashed by this intelligence. "But I don't see that

this fact alters the case—much. Christabel could never have been happy or at peace with a man who had once been devoted to a creature of that class."

"Would you be surprised to hear that creatures of that class are flesh and blood; and that they love us and leave us, and cleave to us and forsake us, just like the women in society?" asked the Major, surveying her with mild scorn.

She was a good woman, no doubt, and acted honestly according to her lights; yet he was angry with her, believing that she had spoiled two lives by her incapacity to take a wide and liberal view of the human comedy.

CHAPTER III.

"GRIEF A FIXED STAR, AND JOY A VANE THAT VEERS."

They went back to the Cornish moors, and the good old manor-house on the hill above the sea; went back to the old life, just the same, in all outward seeming, as it had been before that fatal visit which had brought love and sorrow to Christabel. How lovely the hills looked in the soft summer light; how unspeakably fair the sea in all its glory of sapphire and emerald, and those deep garnet-coloured patches which show where the red sea-weed lurks below, with its pinnacles of rock and colonies of wild living creatures, gull and cormorant, basking in the sun. Little Boscastle, too, gay with the coming and going of many tourists, the merry music of the guard's horn, as the omnibus came jolting down the hill from Bodmin, or the coach wound up the hill to Bude; busy with the bustle of tremendous experiments with

rockets and life-saving apparatus in the soft July darkness; noisy with the lowing of cattle and plaintive tremolo of sheep in the market-place, and all the rude pleasures of a rural fair; alive with all manner of sound and movement, and having a general air of making money too fast for the capability of investment. The whole place was gorged with visitors—not the inn only, but every available bed-chamber at post-office, shop, and cottage was filled with humanity; and the half-dozen or so available pony-carriages were making the journey to Tintagel and back three times a day; while the patient investigators who tramped to St. Nectan's Kieve, without the faintest idea of who St. Nectan was, or what a kieve was, or what manner of local curiosity they were going to see, were legion; all coming back ravenous to the same cosy inn to elbow one another in friendly contiguity at the homely *table d'hôte,* in the yellow light of many candles.

Christabel avoided the village as much as possible during this gay season. She would have avoided it just as much had it been the dull season: the people she shrank from meeting were

not the strange tourists, but the old gaffers and goodies who had known her all their lives—the "uncles" and "aunts"—(in Cornwall uncle and aunt are a kind of patriarchal title given to honoured age)—and who might consider themselves privileged to ask why her wedding was deferred, and when it was to be.

She went with Jessie on long lonely expeditions by sea and land. She had half a dozen old sailors who were her slaves, always ready to take her out in good weather, deeming it their highest privilege to obey so fair a captain, and one who always paid them handsomely for their labour. They went often to Trebarwith Sands, and sat there in some sheltered nook, working and reading at peace, resigned to a life that had lost all its brightness and colour.

"Do you know, Jessie, that I feel like an old maid of fifty?" said Belle on one of those rare occasions when she spoke of her own feelings. "It seems to me as if it were ages since I made up my mind to live and die unmarried, and to make life, somehow or other, self-sufficing—as if Randie and

I were both getting old and grey together. For he is ever so much greyer, the dear thing," she said, laying her hand lovingly on the honest black head and grey muzzle. "What a pity that dogs should grow old so soon, when we are so dependent on their love. Why are they not like elephants, in whose lives a decade hardly counts?"

"Oh, Belle, Belle, as if a beautiful woman of twenty could be dependent on a sheep-dog's affection —when she has all her life before her and all the world to choose from."

"Perhaps you think I could change my lover as some people change their dogs," said Belle, bitterly, "be deeply attached to a collcy this year and next year be just as devoted to a spaniel. My affections are not so easily transferable."

Mrs. Tregonell had told her niece nothing of Angus Hamleigh's final letter to herself. He had given her freedom to communicate as much or as little of that letter as she liked to Christabel—and she had taken the utmost license, and had been altogether silent about it. What good could it do for Christabel to hear of his illness. The knowledge

might inspire her to some wild quixotic act: she might insist upon devoting herself to him—to be his wife in order that she might be his nurse—and surely this would be to ruin her life without helping him to prolong his. The blow had fallen—the sharpest pain of this sudden sorrow had been suffered. Time and youth, and Leonard's faithful love would bring swift healing. "How I loved and grieved for his father," thought Mrs. Tregonell. "Yet I survived his loss, and had a peaceful happy life with the best and kindest of men."

A peaceful happy life, yes—the English matron's calm content in a handsome house and a well-organized household—a good stable—velvet gowns—family diamonds—the world's respect. But that first passionate love of youth—the love that is eager for self-sacrifice, that would welcome beggary—the love which sees a lover independent of all surrounding circumstances, worshipping and deifying the man himself—that sacred flame had been for ever extinguished in Diana Champernowne's heart before she met burly broad-shouldered Squire Tregonell at the county ball.

She wrote to Leonard telling him what had happened, and that he might now count on the fulfilment of that hope which they both had cherished years ago. She asked him to come home at once, but to be careful that he approached Christabel only in a friendly and cousinly character, until there had been ample time for these new wounds to heal.

"She bears her trouble beautifully, and is all goodness and devotion to me—for I have been weak and ailing ever since I came from London—but I know the trial is very hard for her. The house would be more cheerful if you were at home. You might ask one or two of your Oxford friends. No one goes into the billiard-room now. Mount Royal is as quiet as a prison. If you do not come soon, dear boy, I think we shall die of melancholy."

Mr. Tregonell did not put himself out of the way to comply with his loving mother's request. By the time the widow's letter reached him he had made his plans for the winter, and was not disposed to set them aside in order to oblige a lady who was only a necessary detail in his life. A man must

needs have a mother; and, as mothers go, Mrs. Tregonell had been harmless and inoffensive; but she was not the kind of person for whom Leonard would throw over elaborate sporting arrangements, hired guides, horses, carts, and all the paraphernalia needful for Red River explorations. As for Christabel, Mr. Tregonell had not forgiven her for having set another man in the place which he, her cousin and boyish lover in a rough tyrannical way, had long made up his mind to occupy. The fact that she had broken with the man was a redeeming feature in the case; but he was not going into raptures about it; nor was he disposed to return to Mount Royal while she was still moping and regretting the discarded lover.

"Let her get over the doldrums, and then she and I may be friends again," said Leonard to his boon companion, Jack Vandeleur, not a friend of his University days, but an acquaintance picked up on board a Cunard steamer—son of a half-pay naval captain, a man who had begun life in a line regiment, fought in Afghanistan, sold out, and lived by his wits and upon his friends for the last five years.

He had made himself so useful to Mr. Tregonell by his superior experience as a traveller, his pluck and knowledge of all kinds of sport, that he had been able to live at free quarters with that gentleman from an early stage of their acquaintance.

Thus it was that Christabel was allowed to end the year in quietness and peace. Every one was tender and gentle with her, knowing how keenly she must have suffered. There was much disappointment among her country friends at the sorry ending of her engagement; more especially among those who had been in London during the season, and had seen the lovely Cornish *débutante* in her brief day of gladness. No one hinted a question to Christabel herself. The subject of marrying and giving in marriage was judiciously avoided in her presence. But Mrs. Tregonell had been questioned, and had explained briefly that certain painful revelations concerning Mr. Hamleigh's antecedents had constrained Christabel to give him up. Every one said it was a pity. Poor Miss Courtenay looked ill and unhappy. Surely it would have been wiser to waive all question of antecedents, and to trust to

that sweet girl's influence for keeping Mr. Hamleigh straight in the future. "Antecedents, indeed," exclaimed a strong-minded matron, with five marriageable daughters. "It is all very well for a young woman like Miss Courtenay—an only child, with fifteen hundred a year in her own right—to make a fuss about a young man's antecedents. But what would become of my five girls if I were to look at things so closely." Christabel looked at the first column of the *Times* supplement daily to see if there were the advertisement of Angus Hamleigh's marriage with Stella Mayne. She was quite prepared to read such an announcement. Surely, now that she had set him free, he would make this act of atonement, he, in all whose sentiments she had perceived so nice a sense of honour. But no such advertisement appeared. It was possible, however, that the marriage had taken place without any public notification. Mr. Hamleigh might not care to call the world to witness his reparation. She prayed for him daily and nightly, praying that he might be led to do that which was best for his soul's welfare—for his peace here and hereafter—praying that

his days, whether few or many, should be made happy.

There were times when that delicate reticence which made Angus Hamleigh's name a forbidden sound upon the lips of her friends, was a source of keenest pain to Christabel. It would have been painful to her to hear that name lightly spoken, no doubt; but this dull dead silence was worse. One day it flashed upon her that if he were to die nobody would tell her of his death. Kindred and friends would conspire to keep her uninformed. After this she read the list of deaths in the *Times* as eagerly as she read the marriages, but with an agony of fear lest that name, as if written in fire, should leap out upon the page.

At last this painful sense of uncertainty as to the fate of one who, a few months ago, had been a part of her life, became unendurable. Pride withheld her from questioning her aunt or Jessie. She shrank from seeming small and mean in the sight of her own sex. She had made her sacrifice of her own accord, and there was a poverty of character in not being able to maintain the same Spartan courage to

the end. But from Major Bree, the friend and playfellow of her childhood, the indulgent companion of her youth, she could better bear to accept pity—so, one mild afternoon in the beginning of October, when the Major dropped in at his usual hour for tea and gossip, she took him to see the chrysanthemums, in a house on the further side of the lawn; and here, having assured herself there was no gardener within hearing, she took courage to question him.

"Uncle Oliver," she began, falteringly, trifling with the fringed petals of a snowy blossom, "I want to ask you something."

"My dear, I think you must know that there is nothing in the world I would not do for you."

"I am sure of that: but this is not very difficult. It is only to answer one or two questions. Every one here is very good to me—but they make one mistake: they think because I have broken for ever—with—Mr. Hamleigh, that it can do me no good to know anything about him—that I can go on living and being happy, while I am as ignorant of his fate as if we were inhabitants of different

planets. But they forget that after having been all the world to me he cannot all at once become nothing. I have still some faint interest in his fate. It hurts me like an actual pain not to know whether he is alive or dead," she said, with a sudden sob.

"My poor pet!" murmured the Major, taking her hand in both his own. "Have you heard nothing about him since you left London?"

"Not one word. People make believe that there was never any such person in this world."

"They think it wiser to do so, in the hope you will forget him."

"They might as well hope that I shall become a blackamoor," said Christabel, scornfully. "You have more knowledge of the human heart, Uncle Oliver—and you must know that I shall always—remember him. Tell me the truth about him just this once, and I will not mention his name again for a long, long time. He is not dead, is he?"

"Dead!—no, Belle. What put such a notion into your head?"

"Silence always seems like death; and every one has kept silence about him."

"He was ill while he was in Scotland—a touch of the old complaint. I heard of him at Plymouth the other day, from a yachting man who met him in the Isle of Arran, after his illness—he was all right then, I believe."

"Ill—and I never knew of it—dangerously ill, perhaps."

"I don't suppose it was anything very bad. He had been yachting when my Plymouth acquaintance met him."

"He has not married—that person," faltered Christabel.

"What person?"

"Miss Mayne."

"Good heavens, no, my dear—nor ever will."

"But he ought—it is his duty."

"My dear child, that is a question which I can hardly discuss with you. But I may tell you, at least, that there is an all-sufficient reason why Angus Hamleigh would never make such an idiot of himself."

"Do you mean that she could never be worthy of him—that she is irredeemably wicked?" asked Christabel.

"She is not good enough to be any honest man's wife."

"And yet she did not seem wicked: she spoke of him with such intense feeling."

"She seemed—she spoke!" repeated the Major aghast. "Do you mean to tell me that you have seen—that you have conversed with her?"

"Yes: when my aunt told me the story which she heard from Lady Cumberbridge I could not bring myself to believe it until it was confirmed by Miss Mayne's own lips. I made up my mind that I would go and see her—and I went. Was that wrong?"

"Very wrong. You ought not to have gone near her. If you wanted to know more than common rumour could tell you, you should have sent me—your friend. It was a most unwise act."

"I thought I was doing my duty. I think so still," said Christabel, looking at him with frank steadfast eyes. "We are both women. If we stand far apart it is because Providence has given me many blessings which were withheld from her. It is Mr. Hamleigh's duty to repair the wrong he has

done. If he does not he must be answerable to his Maker for the eternal ruin of a soul."

"I tell you again, my dear, that you do not understand the circumstances, and cannot fairly judge the case. You would have done better to take an old soldier's advice before you let the venomous gossip of that malevolent harridan spoil two lives."

"I did not allow myself to be governed by Lady Cumberbridge's gossip, Uncle Oliver. I took nothing for granted. It was not till I had heard the truth from Miss Mayne's lips that I took any decisive step. Mr. Hamleigh accepted my resolve so readily that I can but think it was a welcome release."

"My dear, you went to a queer shop for truth. If you had only known your way about town a little better you would have thought twice before you sacrificed your own happiness in the hope of making Miss Mayne a respectable member of society. But what's done cannot be undone. There's no use in crying over spilt milk. I daresay you and Mr. Hamleigh will meet again and make up your quarrel

before we are a year older. In the meantime don't fret, Belle—and don't be afraid that he will ever marry any one but you. I'll be answerable for his constancy."

The anniversary of Christabel's betrothal came round, St. Luke's Day—a grey October day—with a drizzling West-country rain. She went to church alone, for her aunt was far from well, and Miss Bridgeman stayed at home to keep the invalid company—to read to her and cheer her through the long dull morning. Perhaps they both felt that Christabel would rather be alone on this day. She put on her waterproof coat, took her dog with her, and started upon that wild lonely walk to the church in the hollow of the hills. Randie was a beast of perfect manners, and would lie quietly in the porch all through the service, waiting for his mistress.

She knelt alone just where they two had knelt together. There was the humble altar before which they were to have been married; the rustic shrine of which they had so often spoken as the fittest place for a loving union—fuller of tender meaning than splendid St. George's, with its fine oaken

panelling, painted windows, and Hogarthian architecture. Never at that altar, nor at any other, were they two to kneel. A little year had held all—her hopes and fears—her triumphant love—joy beyond expression—and sadness too deep for tears. She went over the record as she knelt in the familiar pew—her lips moving automatically, repeating the responses—her eyes fixed and tearless.

Then when the service was over she went slowly wandering in and out among the graves, looking at the grey slate tablets, with the names of those whom she had known in life—all at rest now—old people who had suffered long and patiently before they died—a fair young girl who had died of consumption, and whose sufferings had been sharper than those of age—a sailor who had gone out to a ship with a rope one desperate night, and had given his life to save others—all at rest now.

There was no grave being dug to-day. She remembered how, as she and Angus lingered at the gate, the dull sound of the earth thrown from the gravedigger's spade had mixed with the joyous song of the robin perched on the gate. To-day

there was neither gravedigger nor robin—only the soft drip, drip of the rain on dock and thistle, fern and briony. She had the churchyard all to herself, the dog following her about meekly—crawling over grassy mounds, winding in and out among the long wet grass.

"When I die, if you have the ordering of my funeral, be sure I am buried in Minster Churchyard."

That is what Angus had said to her one summer morning, when they were sitting on the Maidenhead coach—and even West-End London, and a London Park, looked lovely in the clear June light. Little chance now that she would be called upon to choose his resting-place—that her hands would fold his in their last meek attitude of submission to the universal conqueror.

"Perhaps he will spend his life in Italy, where no one will know his wife's history," thought Christabel, always believing, in spite of Major Bree's protest, that her old lover would sooner or later make the one possible atonement for an old sin. Nobody except the Major had told her how little the lady deserved that such atonement should be made.

It was Mrs. Tregonell's theory that a well-brought up young woman should be left in darkest ignorance of the darker problems of life.

Christabel walked across the hill, and down by narrow winding ways into the valley, where the river, swollen and turbid after the late rains, tumbled noisily over rock and root and bent the long reeds upon its margin. She crossed the narrow footbridge, and went slowly through the level fields between two long lines of hills—a gorge through which, in bleak weather, the winds blew fiercely. There was another hill to ascend before she reached the field that led to Pentargon Bay—half a mile or so of high road between steep banks and tall unkempt hedges. How short and easy to climb that hill had seemed to her in Angus Hamleigh's company! Now she walked wearily and slowly under the softly falling rain, wondering where he was, and whether he remembered this day.

She could recall every word that he had spoken, and the memory was full of pain; for in the light of her new knowledge it seemed to her that all he had said about his early doom had been an argu-

ment intended to demonstrate to her why he dared not and must not ask her to be his wife—an apology and an explanation as it were—and this apology, this explanation had been made necessary by her own foolishness—by that fatal forgetfulness of self-respect which had allowed her love to reveal itself. And yet, surely that look of rapture which had shone in his eyes as he clasped her to his heart, as he accepted the dedication of her young life, those tender tones, and all the love that had come afterwards could not have been entirely falsehood.

"I cannot believe that he was a hypocrite," she said, standing where they two had sat side by side in the sunlight of that lovely day, gazing at the grey sea, smooth as a lake under the low grey sky. "I think he must have loved me—unwillingly, perhaps—but it was true love while it lasted. He gave his first and best love to that other—but he loved me too. If I had dared to believe him—to trust in my power to keep him. But no; that would have been to confirm him in wrong-doing. It was his duty to marry the girl he wronged."

The thought that her sacrifice had been made to principle rather than to feeling sustained her in this hour as nothing else could have done. If she could only know where he was, and how he fared, and what he meant to do with his future life, she could be happier, she thought.

Luncheon was over when Christabel went back to Mount Royal; but as Mrs. Tregonell was too ill to take anything beyond a cup of beef-tea in her own room this fact was of no consequence. The mistress of Mount Royal had been declining visibly since her return to Cornwall; Mr. Treherne, the family doctor, told Christabel there was no cause for alarm, but he hinted also that her aunt was not likely to be a long-lived woman.

"I'm afraid she worries herself," he said; "she is too anxious about that scapegrace son of hers."

"Leonard is very cruel," answered Christabel; "he lets weeks and even months go by without writing, and that makes his poor mother miserable. She is perpetually worrying herself about imaginary evils—storm and shipwreck, runaway horses, explosions on steamboats."

"If she would but remember a vulgar adage, that 'Nought is never in danger,'" muttered the doctor, with whom Leonard had been no favourite.

"And then she has frightful dreams about him," said Christabel.

"My dear Miss Courtenay, I know all about it," answered Mr. Treherne; "your dear aunt is just in that comfortable position of life in which a woman must worry herself about something or other. 'Man was born to trouble,' don't you know, my dear? The people who haven't real cares are constrained to invent sham ones. Look at King Solomon—did you ever read any book that breathes such intense melancholy in every line as that little work of his called Ecclesiastes. Solomon was living in the lap of luxury when he wrote that little book, and very likely hadn't a trouble in this world. However, imaginary cares can kill as well as the hardest realities, so you must try to keep up your aunt's spirits, and at the same time be sure that she doesn't over-exert herself. She has a weak heart—what we call a tired heart."

"Does that mean heart-disease?" faltered Christabel, with a despairing look.

"Well, my dear, it doesn't mean a healthy heart. It is not organic disease—nothing wrong with the valves—no fear of excruciating pains—but it's a rather risky condition of life, and needs care."

"I will be careful," murmured the girl, with white lips, as the awful shadow of a grief, hardly thought of till this moment, fell darkly across her joyless horizon.

Her aunt, her adopted mother—mother in all sweetest care and love and thoughtful culture—might too soon be taken from her. Then indeed, and then only, could she know what it was to be alone. Keenly, bitterly, she thought how little during the last dismal months she had valued that love—almost as old as her life—and how the loss of a newer love had made the world desolate for her, life without meaning or purpose. She remembered how little more than a year ago—before the coming of Angus Hamleigh—her aunt and she had been all the world to each other, that

tender mother-love all sufficing to fill her life with interest and delight.

In the face of this new fear that sacred love resumed its old place in her mind. Not for an hour, not for a moment of the days to come, should her care or her affection slacken. Not for a moment should the image of him whom she had loved and renounced come between her and her duty to her aunt.

CHAPTER IV.

"LOVE WILL HAVE HIS DAY."

From this time Christabel brightened and grew more like her old self. Mrs. Tregonell told herself that the sharp sorrow was gradually wearing itself out. No girl with such happy surroundings as Christabel's could go on being unhappy for ever. Her own spirits improved with Christabel's increasing brightness, and the old house began to lose its dismal air. Until now the widow's conscience had been ill at ease—she had been perpetually arguing with herself that she had done right—trying to stifle doubts that continually renewed themselves. But now she told herself that the time of sorrow was past, and that her wisdom would be justified by its fruits. She had no suspicion that her niece was striving of set purpose to be cheerful—that these smiles and this bright girlish talk were the result of painful effort, duty triumphing over sorrow.

Mount Royal that winter seemed one of the brightest, most hospitable houses in the neighbourhood. There were no parties; Mrs. Tregonell's delicate health was a reason against that. But there was generally some one staying in the house —some nice girl, whose vivacious talk and whose new music helped to beguile the mother from sad thoughts about her absent son—from wearying doubts as to the fulfilment of her plans for the future. There were people coming and going; old friends driving twenty miles to luncheon, and sometimes persuaded to stay to dinner; nearer neighbours walking three miles or so to afternoon tea. The cheery rector of Trevalga and his family, friends of twenty years' standing, were frequent guests. Mrs. Tregonell was not allowed to excite herself, but she was never allowed to be dull. Christabel and Jessie watched her with unwavering attention—anticipating every wish, preventing every fatigue. A weak and tired heart might hold out for a long time under such tender treatment.

But early in March there came an unexpected trial, in the shape of a sudden and great joy.

Leonard, who had never learnt the rudiments of forethought and consideration for others, drove up to the house one afternoon in a hired chaise from Launceston, just as twilight was creeping over the hills, and dashed unannounced into the room where his mother and the two girls were sitting at tea.

"Who is this?" gasped Mrs. Tregonell, starting up from her low easy chair, as the tall broad-shouldered man, bearded, bronzed, clad in a thick grey coat and big white muffler, stood before her; and then with a shriek she cried, "My son! My son!" and fell upon his breast.

When he placed her in her chair a minute later she was almost fainting, and it was some moments before she recovered speech. Christabel and Jessie thought the shock would have killed her.

"Oh, Leonard! how could you?" murmured Christabel, reproachfully.

"How could I do what?"

"Come home without one word of notice, knowing your mother's delicate health."

"I thought it would be a pleasant surprise for

her. Besides I hadn't made up my mind to come straight home till two o'clock to-day. I had half a mind to take a week in town first, before I came to this God-forsaken hole. You stare at me as if I had no right to be here at all, Belle."

"Leonard, my boy, my boy," faltered the mother, with pale lips, looking up adoringly at the bearded face, so weather-beaten, so hardened and altered from the fresh lines of youth. "If you knew how I have longed for this hour. I have had such fears. You have been in such perilous places—among savages—in all kinds of danger. Often and often I have dreamt that I saw you dead."

"Upon my soul, this is a lively welcome," said Leonard.

"My dearest, I dont want to be dismal," said Mrs. Tregonell, with a faint hysterical laugh. Her heart was beating tumultuously, the hands that clasped her son's were cold and damp. "My soul is full of joy. How changed you are dear! You look as if you had gone through great hardships."

"Life in the Rockies isn't all child's play, mother, but we've had a jolly time of it, on the whole.

America is a magnificent country. I feel deuced sorry to come home—except for the pleasure of seeing you and Belle. Let's have a look at you, Belle, and see if you are as much changed as I am. Step into the light, young lady."

He drew her into the full broad light of a heaped-up wood and coal fire. There was very little daylight in the room. The tapestry curtains fell low over the heavily mullioned Tudor windows, and inside the tapestry there was a screen of soft muslin.

"I have not been shooting moose and skunk, or living in a tent," said Christabel, with a forced laugh. She wanted to be amiable to her cousin—wished even to like him, but it went against the grain. She wondered if he had always been as hateful as this. "You can't expect to find much difference in me after three years' vegetation in Cornwall."

"But you've not been vegetating all the time," said Leonard, looking her over as coolly as if she had been a horse. "You have had a season in London. I saw your name in some of the gossiping journals, when I was last at Montreal. You

wore a pink gown at Sandown. You were one of the prettiest girls at the Royal Fancy Fair. You wore white and tea roses at the Marlborough House garden party. You have been shining in high places, Mistress Belle. I hope it has not spoiled you for a country life."

"I love the country better than ever. I can vouch for that."

"And you have grown ever so much handsomer since I saw you last. I can vouch for that," answered her cousin with his free and easy air. "How d'ye do, Miss Bridgeman?" he said, holding out two fingers to his mother's companion, whose presence he had until this moment ignored.

Jessie remembered Thackeray's advice, and gave the squire one finger in return for his two.

"*You're* not altered," he said, looking at her with a steady stare. "You're the hard-wearing sort, warranted fast colour."

"Give Leonard some tea, Jessie," said Mrs. Tregonell. "I'm sure you would like some tea?" looking lovingly at the tall figure, the hard handsome face.

"I'd rather have a brandy-and-soda," answered Leonard carelessly, "but I don't mind a cup of tea presently, when I've been and had a look round the stables and kennels."

"Oh, Leonard! surely not yet?" said Mrs. Tregonell.

"Not yet! Why I've been in the house ten minutes, and you may suppose I want to know how my hunters have been getting on in the last three years, and whether the colt Nicholls bred is good for anything. I'll just take a hurried look round and be back again slick."

Mrs. Tregonell sighed and submitted. What could she do but submit to a son who had had his own way and followed his own pleasure ever since he could run alone; nay, had roared and protested loudly at every attack upon his liberty when he was still in the invertebrate jelly-fish stage of existence, carried at full-length in his nurse's arms, with his face turned to the ceiling, perpetually contemplating that flat white view of indoor existence which must needs have a depressing influence upon the meditations of infancy. The mothers of spirited

youths have to fulfil their mission, which is for the most part submission.

"How well he looks!" she said, fondly, when the squire had hurried out of the room; "and how he has broadened and filled out."

Jessie Bridgeman thought within herself that he was quite broad enough before he went to America, and that this filling-out process had hardly improved him, but she held her peace.

"He looks very strong," said Christabel. "I could fancy Hercules just such a man. I wonder whether he has brought home any lions' hides, and if he will have one made into a shooting jacket. Dear, dearest Auntie," she went on, kneeling by the widow's chair, "I hope you are quite happy now. I hope your cup of bliss is full."

"I am very happy, sweet one; but the cup is not full yet. I hope it may be before I die—full to overflowing, and that I shall be able to say, 'Lord, let me depart in peace,' with a glad and grateful heart."

Leonard came back from the stables in a rather gloomy mood. His hunters did not look as well

as he expected, and the new colt was weak and weedy. "Nicholls ought to have known better than to breed such a thing, but I suppose he'd say, like the man in Tristram Shandy, that it wasn't his fault," grumbled Mr. Tregonell, as he seated himself in front of the fire, with his feet on the brass fender. He wore clump-soled boots and a rough heather-mixture shooting suit, with knickerbockers and coarse stockings, and his whole aspect was "sporting." Christabel thought of some one else who had sat before the same hearth in the peaceful twilight hour, and wondered if the spiritual differences between these two men were as wide as those of manner and outward seeming. She recalled the exquisite refinement of that other man, the refinement of the man who is a born dandy, who, under the most adverse circumstances, compelled to wear old clothes and to defy fashion, would yet be always elegant and refined of aspect. She remembered that outward grace which seemed the natural indication of a poetical mind—a grace which never degenerated into effeminacy, a refinement which never approached the feeble or the lackadaisical.

Mr. Tregonell stretched his large limbs before the blaze, and made himself comfortable in the spacious plush-covered chair, throwing back his dark head upon a crewel anti-macassar, which was a work of art almost as worthy of notice as a water-colour painting, so exquisitely had the flowers been copied from Nature by the patient needlewoman.

"This is rather more comfortable than the Rockies," he said, as he stirred his tea, with big broad hands, scratched and scarred with hard service. "Mount Royal isn't half a bad place for two or three months in the year. But I suppose you mean to go to London after Easter? Now Belle has tasted blood she'll be all agog for a second plunge. Sandown will be uncommonly jolly this year."

"No, we are not going to town this season."

"Why not? Hard up—spent all the dollars?"

"No, but I don't think Belle would care about it."

"That's bosh. Come, now, Belle, you want to go of course," said Mr. Tregonell, turning to his cousin.

"No, Leonard, that kind of thing is all very well for once in a lifetime. I suppose every woman wants to know what the great world is like—but

one season must resemble another, I should think: just like Boscastle Fair, which I used to fancy so lovely when I was a child, till I began to understand that it was exactly the same every year, and that it was just possible for one to outgrow the idea of its delightfulness."

"That isn't true about London though. There is always something new—new clubs, new theatres, new actors, new race-meetings, new horses, new people. I vote for May and June in Bolton Row."

"I don't think your dear mother's health would be equal to London, this year, Leonard," said Christabel, gravely.

She was angry with this beloved and only son for not having seen the change in his mother's appearance—for talking so loudly and so lightly, as if there were nothing to be thought of in life except his own pleasure.

"What, old lady, are you under the weather?" he asked, turning to survey his mother with a critical air.

This was his American manner of inquiring after

her health. Mrs. Tregonell, when the meaning of the phrase had been explained to her, confessed herself an invalid, for whom the placid monotony of rural life was much safer than the dissipation of a London season.

"Oh, very well," said Leonard with a shrug; "then you and Belle must stop at home and take care of each other—and I can have six weeks in London *en garçon*. It won't be worth while to open the house in Bolton Row—I'd rather stop at an hotel."

"But you won't leave me directly after your return, Leonard?"

"No, no, of course not. Not till after Easter. Easter's three weeks ahead of us. You'll be tired enough of me by that time."

"Tired of you! After three years' absence?"

"Well, you must have got accustomed to doing without me, don't you know," said Leonard, with charming frankness. "When a man has been three years away he can't hurt his friend's feelings much if he dies abroad. They've learnt how easy it is to get along without him."

"Leonard! how can you say such cruel things?" expostulated his mother, with tears in her eyes. The very mention of death, as among the possibilities of existence, scared her.

"There's nothing cruel in it, ma'am; it's only common sense," answered Leonard. "Three years. Well, it's a jolly long time, isn't it? and I dare say to you, in this sleepy hollow of a place, it seemed precious long. But for fellows who are knocking about the world—as Poker Vandeleur and I were—time spins by pretty fast, I can tell you. I'll hoist in some more sap—another cup of tea, if you please, Miss Bridgeman," added Leonard, handing in his empty cup. "It's uncommonly good stuff. Oh! here's old Randie—come here, Randie."

Randie, clutched unceremoniously by the tail, and drawn over the hearthrug, like any inanimate chattel, remonstrated with a growl and a snap. He had never been over-fond of the master of Mount Royal, and absence had not made his heart grow fonder.

"His temper hasn't improved," muttered Leonard, pushing the dog away with his foot.

"His temper is always lovely when he's kindly treated," said Christabel, making room for the dog in her low armchair, whereupon Randie insinuated himself into that soft silken nest, and looked fondly up at his mistress with his honest brown eyes.

"You should let me give you a Pomeranian instead of that ungainly beast," said Leonard.

"No, thanks. Never any other dog while Randie lives. Randie is a person, and he and I have a hundred ideas in common. I don't want a toy dog —a dog that is only meant for show."

"Pomeranians are clever enough for anybody, and they are worth looking at. I wouldn't waste my affection upon an ugly dog any more than I would on an ugly woman."

"Randie is handsome in my eyes," said Christabel, caressing the sheep-dog's grey muzzle.

"I'm through," said Mr. Tregonell, putting down his cup.

He affected Yankee phrases, and spoke with a Yankee twang. America and the Americans had suited him, "down to the ground," as he called it. Their decisive rapidity, that go-a head spirit which

charged life with a kind of mental electricity—made life ever so much better worth living than in the dull sleepy old world where every one was content with the existing condition of things, and only desired to retain present advantages. Leonard loved sport and adventure, action, variety. He was a tyrant, and yet a democrat. He was quite willing to live on familiar term with grooms and game-keepers—but not on equal terms. He must always be master. As much good fellowship as they pleased—but they must all knuckle under to him. He had been the noisy young autocrat of the stable-yard and the saddle-room when he was still in Eton jackets. He lived on the easiest terms with the guides and assistants of his American travels, but he took care to make them feel that he was their employer and, in his own language, "the biggest boss they were ever likely to have to deal with." He paid them lavishly, and gave himself the airs of a Prince—Prince Henry in the wild Falstaffian days, before the charge of a kingdom taught him to be grave, yet with but too little of Henry's gallant spirit and generous instincts.

Three years' travel, in Australia and America, had not exercised a refining influence upon Leonard Tregonell's character or manners. Blind as the mother's love might be, she had insight enough to perceive this, and she acknowledged the fact to herself sadly. There are travellers and travellers: some in whom a wild free life awakens the very spirit of poetry itself—whom unrestrained intercourse with Nature elevates to Nature's grander level—some whose mental power deepens and widens in the solitude of forest or mountain, whose noblest instincts are awakened by loneliness that seems to bring them nearer God. But Leonard Tregonell was not a traveller of this type. Away from the restraints of civilization—the conventional refinements and smoothings down of a rough character—his nature coarsened and hardened. His love of killing wild and beautiful things grew into a passion. He lived chiefly to hunt and to slay, and had no touch of pity for those gracious creatures which looked at their slaughterer reproachfully, with dim pathetic eyes—wide with a wild surprise at man's cruelty. Constant intercourse with men

coarser and more ignorant than himself dragged him down little by little to a lower grade than he had been born to occupy. In all the time that he had been away he had hardly ever opened a book, Great books had been written. Poets, historians, philosophers, theologians had given the fruits of their meditations and their researches to the world, but never an hour had Mr. Tregonell devoted to the study of human progress, to the onward march of human thought. When he was within reach of newspapers he read them industriously, and learnt from a stray paragraph how some great scientific discovery in science, some brilliant success in art, had been the talk of the hour; but neither art nor science interested him. The only papers which he cared about were the sporting papers.

His travels for the most part had been in wild lonely regions, but even in the short intervals that he had spent in cities he had shunned all intellectual amusements. He had heard neither concerts nor lectures, and had only affected the lowest forms of dramatic art. Most of his nights had been spent in bar-rooms or groceries, playing faro, monte,

poker, euchre, and falling in pleasantly with whatever might be the most popular form of gambling in that particular city.

And now he had come back to Mount Royal, having sown his wild oats, and improved himself mentally and physically, as it was supposed by the outside world, by extensive travel; and he was henceforward to reign in his father's place, a popular country gentleman, honourable and honoured, useful in his generation, a friend to rich and poor.

Nobody had any cause for complaint against him during the first few weeks after his return. If his manners were rough and coarse, his language larded with American slang, his conduct was unobjectionable. He was affectionate to his mother, attentive in his free and easy way to Christabel, civil to the old servants, and friendly to old friends. He made considerable alterations in the stables, bought and sold and swopped horses, engaged new underlings, acted in all out-of-door arrangements as if the place were entirely his own, albeit his mother's life-interest in the estate gave her the custody of everything. But his mother was too full of gladness at

his return to object to anything that he did. She opened her purse-strings freely, although his tour had been a costly business. Her income had accumulated in the less expensive period of his boyhood, and she could afford to indulge his fancies.

He went about with Major Bree, looking up old acquaintances, riding over every acre of the estate—lands which stretched far away towards Launceston on one side, towards Bodmin on the other. He held forth largely to the Major on the pettiness and narrowness of an English landscape as compared with that vast continent in which the rivers are as seas and the forests rank and gloomy wildernesses reaching to the trackless and unknown. Sometimes Christabel was their companion in these long rides, mounted on the thoroughbred which Mrs. Tregonell gave her on that last too-happy birthday. The long rides in the sweet soft April air brought health and brightness back to her pale cheeks. She was so anxious to look well and happy for her aunt's sake, to cheer the widow's fading life; but, oh! the unutterable sadness of that ever-present thought of the aftertime, that unanswerable question

as to what was to become of her own empty days when this dear friend was gone.

Happy as Leonard seemed at Mount Royal in the society of his mother and his cousin, he did not forego his idea of a month or so in London. He went up to town soon after Easter, took rooms at an hotel near the Haymarket, and gave himself up to a round of metropolitan pleasures under the guidance of Captain Vandeleur, who had made the initiation of provincial and inexperienced youth a kind of profession. He had a neat way of finding out exactly how much money a young man had to dispose of, present or contingent, and put him through it in the quickest possible time and at the pleasantest pace; but he knew by experience that Leonard had his own ideas about money, and was as keen as experience itself. He would pay the current rate for his pleasures, and no more; and he had a prudential horror of Jews, post-obits, and all engagements likely to damage his future enjoyment of his estate. He was fond of play, but he did not go in the way of losing large sums—"ponies" not "monkies" were his favourite animals—and

he did not care about playing against his chosen friend.

"I like to have you on my side, Poker," he said amiably, when the captain proposed a devilled bone and a hand at écarté after the play. "You're a good deal too clever for a comfortable antagonist. You play écarté with your other young friends, Poker, and I'll be your partner at whist."

Captain Vandeleur, who by this time was tolerably familiar with the workings of his friend's mind, never again suggested those quiet encounters of skill which must inevitably have resulted to his advantage, had Leonard been weak enough to accept the challenge. To have pressed the question would have been to avow himself a sharper. He had won money from his friend at blind hookey; but then at blind hookey all men are equal—and Leonard had accepted the decree of fate; but he was not the kind of man to let another man get the better of him in a series of transactions. He was not brilliant, but he was shrewd and keen, and had long ago made up his mind to get fair value for his money. If he allowed Jack Vandeleur to travel at his expense, or

dine and drink daily at his hotel, it was not because Leonard was weakly generous, but because Jack's company was worth the money. He would not have paid for a pint of wine for a man who was dull, or a bore. At Mount Royal, of course, he was obliged now and then to entertain bores. It was an incident in his position as a leading man in the county—but here in London he was free to please himself, and to give the cold shoulder to uncongenial acquaintance.

Gay as town was, Mr. Tregonell soon tired of it upon this particular occasion. After Epsom and Ascot his enjoyment began to wane. He had made a round of the theatres—he had dined and supped, and played a good many nights at those clubs which he and his friends most affected. He had spent three evenings watching a great billiard match, and he found that his thoughts went back to Mount Royal, and to those he had left there—to Christabel, who had been very kind and sweet to him since his home-coming; who had done much to make home delightful to him—riding with him, playing and singing to him, playing billiards with

him, listening to his stories of travel—interested or seeming interested, in every detail of that wild free life. Leonard did not know that Christabel had done all this for her aunt's sake, in the endeavour to keep the prodigal at home, knowing how the mother's peace and gladness depended on the conduct of her son.

And now, in the midst of London dissipations, Leonard yearned for that girlish companionship. It was dull enough, no doubt, that calm and domestic life under the old roof-tree; but it had been pleasant to him, and he had not wearied of it half so quickly as of this fret and fume, and wear and tear of London amusements. Leonard began to think that his natural bent was towards domesticity, and that, as Belle's husband—there could be no doubt that she would accept him when the time came for asking her—he would shine as a very estimable character, just as his father had shone before him. He had questioned his mother searchingly as to Belle's engagement to Mr. Angus Hamleigh, and was inclined to be retrospectively jealous, and to hate that unknown rival with a fierce hatred; nor

did he fail to blame his mother for her folly in bringing such a man to Mount Royal.

"How could I suppose that Belle would fall in love with him?" asked Mrs. Tregonell, meekly. "I knew how attached she was to you."

"Attached? yes; but that kind of attachment means so little. She had known me all her life. I was nobody in her estimation—no more than the chairs and tables—and this man was a novelty; and again, what has a girl to do in such an out-of-the-way place as this but fall in love with the first comer; it is almost the only amusement open to her. You ought to have known better than to have invited that fellow here, mother; you knew that I meant to marry Belle. You ought to have guarded her for me—kept off dangerous rivals. Instead of that you must needs go out of your way to get that fellow here."

"You ought to have come home sooner, Leonard."

"That's nonsense. I was enjoying my life where I was. How could I suppose you would be such a fool?"

"Don't say such hard things, Leonard. Think how lonely my life was. The invitation to Mr. Hamleigh was not a new idea; I had asked him half a dozen times before. I wanted to see him and know him for his father's sake."

"His father's sake!—a man whom you loved better than ever you loved my father, I dare say."

"No, Leonard, that is not true."

"You think not, perhaps, now my father is dead; but I dare say while he was alive you were always regretting that other man. Nothing exalts a man so much in a woman's mind as his dying. Look at the affection of widows as compared with that of wives."

Mrs. Tregonell strove her hardest to convince her son that his cousin's affections were now free—that it was his business to win her heart: but Leonard complained that his mother had spoiled his chances—that all the freshness of Christabel's feelings must have been worn off in an engagement that had lasted nearly a year.

"She'll have me fast enough, I daresay," he said, with his easy, confident air—that calm masculine

consciousness of superiority, as of one who talks of an altogether inferior creature; "all the faster, perhaps, on account of having made a *fiasco* of her first engagement. A girl doesn't like to be pointed at as jilt or jilted. But I shall always feel uncomfortable about this fellow, Hamleigh. I shall never be able quite to believe in my wife."

"Leonard, how can you talk like that, you who know Christabel's high principles."

"Yes, but I wanted to be sure that she had never cared for any one but me; and you have spoiled my chances of that."

He stayed little more than a month in London, going back to Mount Royal soon after Ascot, and while the June roses were still in their glory. Brief as his absence had been, even his careless eye could see that his mother had changed for the worse since their parting. The hollow cheek had grown hollower, the languid eye more languid, the hand that clung so fondly to his broad, brown palm, was thinner, and more waxen of hue.

His mother welcomed him with warmest love.

"My dearest one," she said, tenderly, "this is an

unexpected delight. It is so good of you to come back to me so soon. I want to have you with me, dear, as much as possible—now."

"Why, mother?" he asked, kindly, for a dull pain in his breast seemed to answer to these words of hers.

"Because I do not think it will be for long. I am very weak, dear. Life seems to be slipping away from me; but there is no pain, no terror. I feel as if I were being gently carried along a slow gliding stream to some sheltered haven, which I can picture to myself, although I have never seen it. I have only one care, Leonard, one anxiety, and that is for your future happiness. I want your life to be full of joy, dearest, and I want it to be a good life, like your father's."

"Yes, he was a good old buffer, wasn't he?" said Leonard. "Everybody about here speaks well of him; but then, I daresay that's because he had plenty of money, and wasn't afraid to spend it, and was an easy master, and all that sort of thing, don't you know. That's a kind of goodness which isn't very difficult for a man to practise."

"Your father was a Christian, Leonard—a sound, practical, Christian, and he did his duty in every phase of life," answered the widow, half proudly, half reproachfully.

"No doubt. All I say is, that it's uncommonly easy to be a Christian under such circumstances."

"Your circumstances will be as easy, I trust, Leonard, and your surroundings no less happy, if you win your cousin for your wife. And I feel sure you will win her. Ask her soon, dear—ask her very soon—that I may see you married to her before I die."

"You think she'll say yes, if I do? I don't want to precipitate matters, and get snubbed for my pains."

"I think she will say yes. She must know how my heart is set upon this marriage. It has been the dream of my life."

Despite his self-assurance—his fixed opinion as to his own personal and social value—Leonard Tregonell hesitated a little at asking that question which must certainly be one of the most solemn inquiries of a man's life. His cousin had been all kindness

and sweetness to him since his return; yet in his inmost heart he knew that her regard for him was at best of a calm, cousinly quality. He knew this, but he told himself that if she were only willing to accept him as her husband, the rest must follow. It would be his business to see that she was a good wife, and in time she would grow fonder of him, no doubt. He meant to be an indulgent husband. He would be very proud of her beauty, grace, accomplishments. There was no man among his acquaintance who could boast of such a charming wife. She should have her own way in everything: of course, so long as her way did not run counter to his. She would be mistress of one of the finest places in Cornwall, the house in which she had been reared, and which she loved with that foolish affection which cats, women, and other inferior animals feel for familiar habitations. Altogether, as Mr. Tregonell told himself, in his simple and expressive language, she would have a very good time, and it would be hard lines if she were not grateful, and did not take kindly to him. Yet he hesitated considerably before putting the crucial

question; and at last took the leap hurriedly, and not too judiciously, one lovely June morning, when he and Christabel had gone for a long ride alone. They were not in the habit of riding alone, and Major Bree was to have been their companion upon this particular morning, but he had sent at the last moment to excuse himself, on account of a touch of sciatica. They rode early, leaving Mount Royal soon after eight, so as to escape the meridian sun. The world was still fresh and dewy as they rode slowly up the hill, and then down again into the lanes leading towards Camelford; and there was that exquisite feeling of purity in the atmosphere which wears off as the day grows older.

"My mother is looking rather seedy, Belle, don't you think," he began.

"She is looking very ill, Leonard. She has been ill for a long time. God grant we may keep her with us a few years yet, but I am full of fear about her. I go to her room every morning with an aching heart, dreading what the night may have brought. Thank God, you came home when you did. It would have been cruel to stay away longer."

"That's very good in you, Belle—uncommonly good—to talk about cruelty, when you must know that it was your fault I stayed away so long."

"My fault? What had I to do with it."

"Everything. I should have been home a year and a half ago—home last Christmas twelvemonth. I had made all my plans with that intention, for I was slightly home-sick in those days—didn't relish the idea of three thousand miles of everlasting wet between me and those I loved—and I was coming across the Big Drink as fast as a Cunard could bring me, when I got mother's letter telling me of your engagement. Then I coiled up, and made up my mind to stay in America till I'd done some big licks in the sporting line."

"Why should that have influenced you?" Christabel asked, coldly.

"Why? Confound it! Belle, you know that without asking. You must know that it wouldn't be over-pleasant for me to be living at Mount Royal while you and your lover were spooning about the place. You don't suppose I could quite have stomached that, do you—to see another man making

love to the girl I always meant to marry ?—for you know, Belle, I always did mean it. When you were in pinafores I made up my mind that you were the future Mrs. Tregonell."

"You did me a great honour," said Belle, with an icy smile, "and I suppose I ought to be very proud to hear it—now. Perhaps, if you had told me your intention while I was in pinafores I might have grown up with a due appreciation of your goodness. But you see, as you never said anything about it, my life took another bent."

"Don't chaff, Belle," exclaimed Leonard, "I'm in earnest. I was hideously savage when I heard that you had got yourself engaged to a man whom you'd only known a week or two—a man who had led a racketty life in London and Paris——"

"Stop," cried Christabel, turning upon him with flashing eyes, "I forbid you to speak of him. What right have you to mention his name to me? I have suffered enough, but that is an impertinence I will not endure. If you are going to say another word about him I'll ride back to Mount Royal as fast as my horse can carry me."

"And get spilt on the way. Why, what a spitfire you are, Belle. I had no idea there was such a spice of the devil in you," said Leonard, somewhat abashed by this rebuff. "Well I'll hold my tongue about him in future. I'd much rather talk about you and me, and our prospects. What is to become of you, Belle, when the poor mother goes? You and the doctor have both made up your minds that she's not long for this world. For my own part, I'm not such a croaker, and I've known many a creaking door hanging a precious long time on its hinges. Still, it's well to be prepared for the worst. Where is your life to be spent, Belle, when the mater has sent in her checks?"

"Heaven knows," answered Christabel, tears welling up in her eyes, as she turned her head from the questioner. "My life will be little worth living when she is gone—but I daresay I shall go on living, all the same. Sorrow takes such a long time to kill any one. I suppose Jessie and I will go on the Continent, and travel from place to place, trying to forget the old dear life among new scenes and new people."

"And nicely you will get yourself talked about," said Leonard, with that unhesitating brutality which his friends called frankness—"a young and handsome woman, without any male relative, wandering about the Continent."

"I shall have Jessie."

"A paid companion—a vast protection she would be to you—about as much as a Pomeranian dog, or a poll parrot."

"Then I can stay in England," answered Christabel, indifferently. "It will matter very little where I live."

"Come, Belle," said Leonard, in a friendly, comfortable tone, laying his broad strong hand on her horse's neck, as they rode slowly side by side up the narrow road, between hedges filled with honeysuckle and eglantine, "this is flying in the face of Providence, which has made you young and handsome, and an heiress, in order that you might get the most out of life. Is a young woman's life to come to an end all at once because an elderly woman dies? That's rank nonsense. That's the kind of way widows talk in their first edition of crape and caps. But

they don't mean it, my dear; or, say they think they mean it, they never hold by it. That kind of widow is always a wife again before the second year of her widowhood is over. And to hear you—not quite one-and-twenty, and as fit as a fid—in the very zenith of your beauty," said Leonard, hastily correcting the horsey turn of his compliment,—"to hear you talk in that despairing way is too provoking. Come, Belle, be rational. Why should you go wandering about Switzerland and Italy with a shrewish little old maid like Jessie Bridgeman—when—when you can stay at Mount Royal and be its mistress. I always meant you to be my wife, Belle, and I still mean it—in spite of bygones."

"You are very good—very forgiving," said Christabel, with most irritating placidity, "but unfortunately I never meant to be your wife then—and I don't mean it now."

"In plain words, you reject me?"

"If you intend this for an offer, most decidedly," answered Christabel, as firm as a rock. "Come, Leonard, don't look so angry; let us be friends and cousins—almost brother and sister—as we have

been in all the years that are gone. Let us unite in the endeavour to make your dear mother's life happy—so happy, that she may grow strong and well again—restored by perfect freedom from care. If you and I were to quarrel she would be miserable. We must be good friends always—if it were only for her sake."

"That's all very well, Christabel, but a man's feelings are not so entirely within his control as you seem to suppose. Do you think I shall ever forget how you threw me over for a fellow you had only known a week or so—and now, when I tell you how, from my boyhood, I have relied upon your being my wife—always kept you in my mind as the one only woman who was to bear my name, and sit at the head of my table, you coolly inform me that it can never be? You would rather go wandering about the world with a hired companion——"

"Jessie is not a hired companion—she is my very dear friend."

"You choose to call her so—but she came to Mount Royal in answer to an advertisement, and my mother pays her wages, just like the housemaids.

You would rather roam about with Jessie Bridgeman, getting yourself talked about at every table d'hôte in Europe—a prey for every Captain Deuceace, or Loosefish, on the Continent—than you would be my wife, and mistress of Mount Royal."

"Because nearly a year ago I made up my mind never to be any man's wife, Leonard," answered Christabel, gravely. "I should hate myself if I were to depart from that resolve."

"You mean that when you broke with Mr. Hamleigh you did not think there was any one in the world good enough to stand in his shoes," said Leonard, savagely. "And for the sake of a man who turned out so badly that you were obliged to chuck him up, you refuse a fellow who has loved you all his life."

Christabel turned her horse's head, and went homewards at a sharp trot, leaving Leonard, discomfited, in the middle of the lane. He had nothing to do but to trot meekly after her, afraid to go too fast, lest he should urge her horse to a bolt, and managing at last to overtake her at the bottom of a hill.

"Do find some grass somewhere, so that we may get a canter," she said; and her cousin knew that there was to be no more conversation that morning.

CHAPTER V.

"BUT HERE IS ONE WHO LOVES YOU AS OF OLD."

After this Leonard sulked, and the aspect of home life at Mount Royal became cloudy and troubled. He was not absolutely uncivil to his cousin, but he was deeply resentful, and he showed his resentment in various petty ways—descending so low as to give an occasional sly kick to Randie. He was grumpy in his intercourse with his mother; he took every opportunity of being rude to Miss Bridgeman; he sneered at all their womanly occupations, their charities, their church-going. That domestic sunshine which had so gladdened the widow's heart, was gone for ever, as it seemed. Her son now snatched at every occasion for getting away from home. He dined at Bodmin one night —at Launceston, another. He had friends to meet at Plymouth, and dined and slept at the "Duke of Cornwall." He came home bringing worse devils

—in the way of ill-temper and rudeness—than those which he had taken away with him. He no longer pretended the faintest interest in Christabel's playing—confessing frankly that all classical compositions, especially those of Beethoven, suggested to him that far-famed melody which was fatal to the traditional cow. He no longer offered to make her a fine billiard-player. "No woman ever could play billiards," he said, contemptuously—"they have neither eye nor wrist; they know nothing about strengths; and always handle their cue as if it was Moses's rod, and was going to turn into a snake and bite 'em."

Mrs. Tregonell was not slow to guess the cause of her son's changed humour. She was too intensely anxious for the fulfilment of this chief desire of her soul not to be painfully conscious of failure. She had urged Leonard to speak soon—and he had spoken—with disastrous result. She had seen the angry cloud upon her son's brow when he came home from that tête-à-tête ride with Christabel. She feared to question him, for it was her rash counsel, perhaps, which had brought this evil result

to pass. Yet she could not hold her peace for ever. So one evening, when Jessie and Christabel were dining at Trevalga Rectory, and Mrs. Tregonell was enjoying the sole privilege of her son's company, she ventured to approach the subject.

"How altered you have been lately"—lately, meaning for at least a month—"in your manner to your cousin, Leonard," she said, with a feeble attempt to speak lightly, her voice tremulous with suppressed emotion. "Has she offended you in any way? You and she used to be so very sweet to each other."

"Yes, she was all honey when I first came home, wasn't she, mother?" returned Leonard, nursing his boot, and frowning at the lamp on the low table by Mrs. Tregonell's chair. "All hypocrisy—rank humbug—that's what it was. She is still bewailing that fellow whom you brought here—and, mark my words, she'll marry him sooner or later. She threw him over in a fit of temper, and pride, and jealousy; and when she finds she can't live without him she'll take some means of bringing him back to her. It was all your doing, mother. You spoiled my

chances when you brought your old sweetheart's son into this house. I don't think you could have had much respect for my dead father when you invited that man to Mount Royal."

Mrs. Tregonell's mild look of reproach might have touched the hardest heart; but it was lost on Leonard, who sat scowling at the lamp, and did not once meet his mother's eyes.

"It is not kind of you to say that, Leonard," she said gently; "you ought to know that I was a true and loving wife to your father, and that I have always honoured his memory, as a true wife should. He knew that I was interested in Angus Hamleigh's career, and he never resented that feeling. I am sorry your cousin has rejected you—more sorry than even you yourself can be, I believe—for your marriage has been the dream of my life. But we cannot control fate. Are you really fond of her, dear?"

"Fond of her? A great deal too fond—foolishly—ignominiously fond of her—so fond that I am beginning to detest her."

"Don't despair then, Leonard. Let this first

refusal count for nothing. Only be patient, and gentle with her—not cold and rude, as you have been lately."

"It's easy to talk," said Leonard, contemptuously. "But do you suppose I can feel very kindly towards a girl who refused me as coolly as if I had been asking her to dance, and who let me see at the same time that she is still passionately in love with Angus Hamleigh. You should have seen how she blazed out at me when I mentioned his name—her eyes flaming—her cheeks first crimson and then deadly pale. That's what love means. And, even if she were willing to be my wife to-morrow, she would never give me such love as that. Curse her," muttered the lover between his clenched teeth; "I didn't know how fond I was of her till she refused me—and now, I could crawl at her feet, and sue to her as a palavering Irish beggar sues for alms, cringing and fawning, and flattering and lying—and yet in my heart of hearts I should be savage with her all the time, knowing that she will never care for me as she cared for that other fellow."

"Leonard, if you knew how it pains me to hear you talk like that," said Mrs. Tregonell. "It makes me fearful of your impetuous, self-willed nature."

"Self-will be ——! somethinged!" growled Leonard. "Did you ever know a man who cultivated anybody else's will? Would you have me pretend to be better than I am—tell you that I can feel all affection for the girl who preferred the first stranger who came in her way to the playfellow and companion of her childhood?"

"If you had been a little less tormenting, a little less exacting with her in those days, Leonard, I think she would have remembered you more tenderly," said Mrs. Tregonell.

"If you are going to lecture me about what I was as a boy we'd better cut the conversation," retorted Leonard. "I'll go and practise the spot-stroke for half an hour, while you take your after-dinner nap."

"No, dear, don't go away. I don't feel in the least inclined for sleep. I had no idea of lecturing you, Leonard, believe me; only I cannot help regretting, as you do, that Christabel should not be more attached

to you. But I feel very sure that, if you are patient, she will come to think differently by-and-by."

"Didn't you tell me to ask her—and quickly?"

"Yes, that was because I was impatient. Life seemed slipping away from me—and I was so eager to be secure of my dear boy's happiness. Let us try different tactics, Leo. Take things quietly for a little—behave to your cousin just as if there had been nothing of this kind between you—and who knows what may happen."

"I know of one thing that may and will happen next October, unless the lady changes her tune," answered Leonard, sulkily.

"What is that?"

"I shall go to South America—do a little mountaineering in the Equatorial Andes—enjoy a little life in Valparaiso, Truxillo — Lord knows where! I've done North America, from Canada to Frisco, and now I shall do the South."

"Leonard, you would not be so cruel as to leave me to die in my loneliness; for I think, dear, you must know that I have not long to live."

"Come, mother, I believe you fancy yourself ever

so much worse than you really are. This jog-trot, monotonous life of yours would breed vapours in the liveliest person. Besides, if you should be ill while I am away, you'll have your niece, whom you love as a daughter—and perhaps your niece's husband, this dear Angus of yours—to take care of you."

"You are very hard upon me, Leonard—and yet, I went against my conscience for your sake. I let Christabel break with her lover. I said never one word in his favour, although I must have known in my heart that they would both be miserable. I had your interest at heart more than theirs—I thought, 'here is a chance for my boy.'"

"You were very considerate—a day after the fair. Don't you think it would have been better to be wise before the event, and not to have invited that coxcomb to Mount Royal?"

He came again and again to the charge, always with fresh bitterness. He could not forgive his mother for this involuntary wrong which she had done to him.

After this he went off to the solitude of the billiard-room, and a leisurely series of experiments

upon the spot-stroke. It was his only idea of a contemplative evening.

He was no less sullen and gloomy in his manner to Christabel next morning at breakfast, for all his mother had said to him overnight. He answered his cousin in monosyllables, and was rude to Randie—wondered that his mother should allow dogs in her dining-room—albeit Randie's manners were far superior to his own.

Later in the morning, when Christabel and her aunt were alone, the girl crept to her favourite place beside Mrs. Tregonell's chair, and with her folded arms resting on the cushioned elbow, looked up lovingly at the widow's grave, sad face.

"Auntie, dearest, you know so well how fondly I love you, that I am sure you won't think me any less loving and true, if I ask you to let me leave you for a little while. Let me go away somewhere with Jessie, to some quiet German town, where I can improve myself in music, and where she and I can lead a hard-working, studious life, just like a couple of Girton girls. You remember, last year you suggested that we should travel, and I refused

your offer, thinking that I should be happier at home; but now I feel the need of a change."

"And you would leave me, now that my health is broken, and that I am so dependent on your love?" said Mrs. Tregonell, with mild reproachfulness.

Christabel bent down to kiss the thin, white hand that lay on the cushion near her—anxious to hide the tears that sprang quickly to her eyes.

"You have Leonard," she faltered. "You are happy, are you not, dearest, now Leonard is at home again."

"At home—yes, I thank God that my son is under my roof once more. But how long may he stay at home? How much do I have of his company—in and out all day—anywhere but at my side—making every possible excuse for leaving me? He has begun, already, to talk of going to South America in the autumn. Poor boy, he is restless and unhappy; and I know the reason. You must know it too, Belle. It is your fault. You have spoiled the dream of my life."

"Auntie, is this generous, is this fair?" pleaded

Christabel, with her head still bent over the pale wasted hand.

"It is natural at least," answered the widow, impetuously. "Why cannot you care for my boy, why cannot you understand and value his devotion? It is not an idle fancy—born of a few weeks' acquaintance—not the last new caprice of a battered *roué*, who offers his worn-out heart to you when other women have done with it. Leonard's is the love of long years—the love of a fresh unspoiled nature. I know that he has not Angus Hamleigh's refinement of manner—he is not so clever—so imaginative—but of what value is such surface refinement when the man's inner nature is coarse and profligate. A man who has lived among impure women must have become coarse; there must be deterioration, ruin, for a man's nature in such a life as that," continued Mrs. Tregonell, passionately, her resentment against Angus Hamleigh kindling as she thought how he had ousted her son. "Why should you not value my boy's love?" she asked again. "What is there wanting in him that you should treat him so contemptuously? He is young,

handsome, brave—owner of this place of which you are so fond. Your marriage with him would bring the Champernowne estate together again. Everybody was sorry to see it divided. It would bring together two of the oldest and best names in the county. You might call your eldest son Champernowne Tregonell."

"Don't, Auntie, don't go on like that," entreated Christabel, piteously: "if you only knew how little such arguments influence me: 'the glories of our rank and state are shadows, not substantial things.' What difference do names and lands make in the happiness of a life? If Angus Hamleigh had been a ploughman's son, like Burns—nameless—penniless—only just himself, I should have loved him exactly the same. Dearest, these are the things in which we cannot be governed by other people's wisdom. Our hearts choose for us; in spite of us. I have been obliged to think seriously of life since Leonard and I had that unlucky conversation the other day He told you about it, perhaps?"

"He told me that you refused him."

"As I would have refused any other man, Auntie.

I have made up my mind to live and die unmarried. It is the only tribute I can offer to one I loved so well."

"And who proved so unworthy of your love," said Mrs. Tregonell, moodily.

"Do not speak of him, if you cannot speak kindly. You once loved his father, but you seem to have forgotten that. Let me go away for a little while, Auntie—a few months only, if you like. My presence in this house only does harm. Leonard is angry with me—and you are angry for his sake. We are all unhappy now—nobody talks freely—or laughs—or takes life pleasantly. We all feel constrained and miserable. Let me go, dear. When I am gone you and Leonard can be happy together."

"No, Belle, we cannot. You have spoiled his life. You have broken his heart."

Christabel smiled a little contemptuously at the mother's wailing. "Hearts are not so easily broken," she said, "Leonard's least of all. He is angry because for the first time in his life he finds himself thwarted. He wants to marry me, and I

don't want to marry him. Do you remember how angry he was when he wanted to go out shooting, at eleven years of age, and you refused him a gun. He moped and fretted for a week, and you were quite as unhappy as he was. It is almost the first thing I remember about him. When he found you were quite firm in your refusal, he left off sulking, and reconciled himself to the inevitable. He will do just the same about this refusal of mine—when I am out of his sight. But my presence here irritates him."

"Christabel, if you leave me I shall know that you have never loved me," said Mrs. Tregonell, with sudden vehemence. "You must know that I am dying—very slowly, perhaps—a wearisome decay for those who can only watch and wait, and bear with me till I am dead. But I know and feel that I am dying. This trouble will hasten my end, and instead of dying in peace, with the assurance of my boy's happy future—with the knowledge that he will have a virtuous and loving wife, a wife of my own training, to guide him and influence him for good—I shall die miserable, fearing that he may fall into

evil hands, and that evil days may come upon him. I know how impetuous, how impulsive he is; how easily governed through his feelings, how little able to rule himself by hard common-sense. And you, who have known him all your life—who know the best and worst of him—you can be so indifferent to his happiness, Christabel. How can I believe, in the face of this, that you ever loved me, his mother?"

"I have loved you as *my* mother," replied the girl, with her arms round her aunt's neck, her lips pressed against that pale thin cheek. "I love you better than any one in this world. If God would spare you for years to come, and we could live always together, and be all in all to each other as we have been, I think I could be quite happy. Yes, I could feel as if there were nothing wanting in this life. But I cannot marry a man I do not love, whom I never can love."

"He would take you on trust, Belle," murmured the mother, imploringly; "he would be content with duty and good faith. I know how true and loyal you are, dearest, and that you would be a perfect wife. Love would come afterwards."

"Will it make you happier if I don't go away, Auntie?" asked Christabel, gently.

"Much happier."

"Then I will stay; and Leonard may be as rude to me as he likes; he may do anything disagreeable, except kick Randie; and I will not murmur. But you and I must never talk of him as we have talked to-day: it can do no good."

After this came much kissing and hugging, and a few tears; and it was agreed that Christabel should forego her idea of six months' study of classical music at the famous conservatoire at Leipsic.

She and Jessie had made all their plans before she spoke to her aunt; and when she informed Miss Bridgeman that she had given way to Mrs. Tregonell's wish, and had abandoned all idea of Germany, that strong-minded young woman expressed herself most unreservedly.

"You are a fool!" she exclaimed. "No doubt that's an outrageous remark from a person in my position to an heiress like you; but I can't help it. You are a fool—a yielding, self-abnegating fool! If you stay here you will marry that man. There

is no escape possible for you. Your aunt has made up her mind about it. She will worry you till you give your consent, and then you will be miserable ever afterwards."

"I shall do nothing of the kind. I wonder that you can think me so weak."

"If you are weak enough to stay, you will be weak enough to do the other thing," retorted Jessie.

"How can I go when my aunt looks at me with those sad eyes, dying eyes—they are so changed since last year—and implores me to stop? I thought you loved her, Jessie?"

"I do love her, with a fond and grateful affection. She was my first friend outside my own home; she is my benefactress. But I have to think of your welfare, Christabel—your welfare in this world and the world to come. Both will be in danger if you stay here and marry Leonard Tregonell."

"I am going to stay here; and I am not going to marry Leonard. Will that assurance satisfy you? One would think I had no will of my own."

"You have not the will to withstand your aunt. She parted you and Mr. Hamleigh; and she will marry you to her son."

"The parting was my act," said Christabel.

"It was your aunt who brought it about. Had she been true and loyal there would have been no such parting. If you had only trusted to me in that crisis, I think I might have saved you some sorrow; but what's done cannot be undone."

"There are some cases in which a woman must judge for herself," Christabel replied, coldly.

"A woman, yes—a woman who has had some experience of life: but not a girl, who knows nothing of the hard real world and its temptations, difficulties, struggles. Don't let us talk of it any more. I cannot trust myself to speak when I remember how shamefully he was treated."

Christabel stared in amazement. The calm, practical Miss Bridgeman spoke with a passionate vehemence which took the girl's breath away; and yet, in her heart of hearts, Christabel was grateful to her for this sudden flash of anger.

"I did not know you liked him so much—that you were so sorry for him," she faltered.

"Then you ought to have known, if you ever took the trouble to remember how good he always was to me, how sympathetic, how tolerant of my company when it was forced upon him day after day, how seemingly unconscious of my plainness and dowdiness. Why there was not a present he gave me which did not show the most thoughtful study of my tastes and fancies. I never look at one of his gifts—I was not obliged to fling his offerings back in his face as you were—without wondering that a fine gentleman could be so full of small charities and delicate courtesy. He was like one of those wits and courtiers one reads of in Burnet —not spotless, like Tennyson's Arthur—but the very essence of refinement and good feeling. God bless him! wherever he is."

"You are very odd sometimes, Jessie," said Christabel, kissing her friend, "but you have a noble heart."

There was a marked change in Leonard's conduct when he and his cousin met in the drawing-

room before dinner. He had been absent at luncheon, on a trout-fishing expedition; but there had been time since his return for a long conversation between him and his mother. She had told him how his sullen temper had almost driven Christabel from the house, and how she had been only induced to stay by an appeal to her affection. This evening he was all amiability, and tried to make his peace with Randie, who received his caresses with a stolid forbearance rather than with gratification. It was easier to make friends with Christabel than with the dog, for she wished to be kind to her cousin on his mother's account.

That evening the reign of domestic peace seemed to be renewed. There were no thunder-clouds in the atmosphere. Leonard strolled about the lawn with his mother and Christabel, looking at the roses, and planning where a few more choice trees might yet be added to the collection. Mrs. Tregonell's walks now rarely went beyond this broad velvet lawn, or the shrubberies that bordered it. She drove to church on Sundays, but she had left off visiting that involved long drives, though she

professed herself delighted to see her friends. She did not want the house to become dull and gloomy for Leonard. She even insisted that there should be a garden party on Christabel's twenty-first birthday; and she was delighted when some of the old friends who came to Mount Royal that day insinuated their congratulations, in a tentative manner, upon Miss Courtenay's impending engagement to her cousin.

"There is nothing definitely settled," she told Mrs. St. Aubyn, "but I have every hope that it will be so. Leonard adores her."

"And it would be a much more suitable match for her than the other," said Mrs. St. Aubyn, a commonplace matron of irreproachable lineage: "it would be so nice for you to have her settled near you. Would they live at Mount Royal?"

"Of course. Where else should my son live but in his father's house?"

"But it is your house."

"Do you think I should allow my life-interest in the place to stand in the way of Leonard's enjoyment of it," exclaimed Mrs. Tregonell. "I

should be proud to take the second place in his house—proud to see his young wife at the head of his table."

"That is all very well in theory, but I have never seen it work out well in fact," said the Rector of Trevalga, who made a third in the little group seated on the edge of the wide lawn, where sportive youth was playing tennis, in half a dozen courts, to the enlivening strains of a military band from Bodmin barracks.

"How thoroughly happy Christabel looks," observed another friendly matron to Mrs. Tregonell, a little later in the afternoon: "she seems to have quite got over her trouble about Mr. Hamleigh."

"Yes, I hope that is forgotten," answered Mrs. Tregonell.

This garden party was an occasion of unspeakable pain to Christabel. Her aunt had insisted upon sending out the invitations. There must be some kind of festival upon her adopted daughter's coming of age. The inheritor of lands and money was a person whose twenty-first birthday

could not be permitted to slip by unmarked, like any other day in the calendar.

"If we were to have no garden party this summer people would say you were broken-hearted at the sad end of last year's engagement, darling," said Mrs. Tregonell, when Christabel had pleaded against the contemplated assembly, "and I know your pride would revolt at that."

"Dear Auntie, my pride has been levelled to the dust, if I ever had any; it will not raise its head on account of a garden party."

Mrs. Tregonell insisted, albeit even her small share of the preparations, the mere revision of the list of guests—the discussion and acceptance of Jessie Bridgeman's arrangements—was a fatigue to the jaded mind and enfeebled body. When the day came the mistress of Mount Royal carried herself with the old air of quiet dignity which her friends knew so well. People saw that she was aged, that she had grown pale and thin and wan; and they ascribed this change in her to anxiety about her niece's engagement. There were vague ideas as to the cause of Mr. Hamleigh's dismissal—

dim notions of terrible iniquities, startling revelations, occurring on the very brink of marriage. That section of county society which did not go to London knew a great deal more about the details of the story than the people who had been in town at the time and had seen Miss Courtenay and her lover almost daily. For those daughters of the soil who but rarely crossed the Tamar the story of Miss Courtenay's engagement was a social mystery of so dark a complexion that it afforded inexhaustible material for tea-table gossip. A story, of which no one seemed to know the exact details, gave wide ground for speculation, and could always be looked at from new points of view.

And now here was the same Miss Courtenay smiling upon her friends, fair and radiant, showing no traces of last year's tragedy in her looks or manners; being, indeed, one of those women who do not wear their hearts upon their sleeves for daws to peck at. The local mind, therefore, arrived at the conclusion that Miss Courtenay had consoled herself for the loss of one lover by the gain of another, and was now engaged to her cousin.

Clara St. Aubyn ventured to congratulate her upon this happy issue out of bygone griefs.

"I am so glad," she said, squeezing Christabel's hand, during an inspection of the hot-houses. "I like him so much."

"I don't quite understand," replied Christabel, with a freezing look: "who is it whom you like? The new Curate?"

"No dear, don't pretend to misunderstand me. I am so pleased to think that you and your cousin are going to make a match of it. He is so handsome—such a fine, frank, open-hearted manner—so altogether nice."

"I am pleased to hear you praise him," said Christabel, still supremely cold; "but my cousin is my cousin, and will never be anything more."

"You don't mean that?"

"I do—without the smallest reservation."

Clara became thoughtful. Leonard Tregonell was one of the best matches in the county, and he had always been civil to her. They had tastes in common, were both horsey and doggy, and plain-spoken to brusqueness. Why should not she be mistress

of Mount Royal, by-and-by, if Christabel despised her opportunities?

At half-past seven, the last carriage had driven away from the porch; and Mrs. Tregonell, thoroughly exhausted by the exertions of the afternoon, reclined languidly in her favourite chair, moved from its winter-place by the hearth, to a deep embayed window looking on to the rose-garden. Christabel sat on a stool at her aunt's feet, her fair head resting against the cushioned elbow of Mrs. Tregonell's chair.

"Well, Auntie, the people are gone and the birthday is over. Isn't that a blessing?" she said lightly.

"Yes, dear, it is over, and you are of age—your own mistress. My guardianship expires to-day. I wonder whether I shall find any difference in my darling now she is out of leading-strings."

"I don't think you will, Auntie. I have not much inclination for desperate flights of any kind. What can freedom or the unrestricted use of my fortune give me, which your indulgence has not already given? What whim or fancy of mine

have you ever thwarted? No, Aunt Di, I don't think there is any scope for rebellion on my part."

"And you will not leave me, dear, till the end?" pleaded the widow. "Your bondage cannot be for very long."

"Auntie! how can you speak like that, when you know—when you must know that I have no one in the world but you, now—no one, dearest," said Christabel, on her knees at her aunt's feet, clasping and kissing the pale transparent hands. "I have not the knack of loving many people. Jessie is very good to me, and I am fond of her as my friend and companion. Uncle Oliver is all goodness, and I am fond of him in just the same way. But I never *loved* any one but you and Angus. Angus is gone from me, and if God takes you, Auntie, my prayer is that I may speedily follow you."

"My love, that is a blasphemous prayer: it implies doubt in God's goodness. He means the young and innocent to be happy in this world—happy and a source of happiness to others. You

will form new ties: a husband and children will console you for all you have lost in the past."

"No, aunt, I shall never marry. Put that idea out of your mind. You will think less badly of me for refusing Leonard if you understand that I have made up my mind to live and die unmarried."

"But I cannot and will not believe that, Belle: whatever you may think now, a year hence your ideas will have entirely altered. Remember my own history. When George Hamleigh died I thought the world—so far as it concerned me—had come to an end, that I had only to wait for death. My fondest hope was that I should die within the year, and be buried in a grave near his—yet five years afterwards I was a happy wife and mother."

"God was good to you," said Christabel, quietly, thinking all the while that her aunt must have been made of a different clay from herself. There was a degradation in being able to forget: it implied a lower kind of organism than that finely strung nature which loves once and once only.

CHAPTER VI.

"THAT LIP AND VOICE ARE MUTE FOR EVER."

HAVING pledged herself to remain with her aunt to the end, Christabel was fain to make the best of her life at Mount Royal, and in order to do this she must needs keep on good terms with her cousin. Leonard's conduct of late had been irreproachable: he was attentive to his mother, all amiability to Christabel, and almost civil to Miss Bridgeman. He contrived to make his peace with Randie, and he made such a good impression upon Major Bree that he won the warm praises of that gentleman.

The cross country rides were resumed, the Major always in attendance; and Leonard and his cousin were seen so often together, riding, driving, or walking, that the idea of an engagement between them became a fixture in the local mind, which held that when one was off with the old love it was well to be on with the new.

And so the summer ripened and waned. Mrs. Tregonell's health seemed to improve in the calm happiness of a domestic life in which there was no indication of disunion. She had never surrendered her hope of Christabel's relenting. Leonard's frank and generous character—his good looks—his local popularity—must ultimately prevail over the memory of another—that other having so completely given up his chances. Mrs. Tregonell was half inclined to recognize the nobleness of that renunciation; half disposed to accept it as a proof that Angus Hamleigh's heart still hankered after the actress who had been his first infatuation. In either case no one could doubt that it was well for Christabel to be released from such an engagement. To wed Angus would have been to tie herself to sickness and death—to take upon herself the burden of early widowhood, to put on sackcloth and ashes as a wedding garment.

It was winter, and there were patches of snow upon the hills, and sea and sky were of one chill slaty hue, before Leonard ventured to repeat that question which he had asked with such ill effect in

the sweet summer morning, between hedgerows flushed with roses. But through all the changes of the waning year there had been one purpose in his mind, and every act of his life had tended to one result. He had sworn to himself that his cousin should be his wife. Whatever barriers of disinclination, direct antagonism even, there might be on her side must be broken down by dogged patience, unyielding determination on his side. He had the spirit of the hunter, to whom that prey is most precious which costs the longest chase. He loved his cousin more passionately to-day, after keeping his feelings in check for six months, than he had loved her when he asked her to be his wife. Every day of delay had increased his ardour and strengthened his resolve.

It was New Year's day. Christabel and Miss Bridgeman had been to church in the morning, and had taken a long walk with Leonard, who contrived to waylay them at the church door after church. Then had come a rather late luncheon, after which Christabel spent an hour in her aunt's room reading to her, and talking a little in a subdued way. It

was one of Mrs. Tregonell's bad days, a day upon which she could hardly leave her sofa, and Christabel came away from the invalid's room full of sadness.

She was sitting by the fire in the library, alone in the dusk save for Randie's company, when her cousin came in and found her.

"Why, Belle, what are you doing all alone in the dark?" he exclaimed. "I almost thought the room was empty."

"I have been thinking," she said, with a sigh.

"Your thoughts could not have been over-pleasant, I should think, by that sigh," said Leonard, coming over to the hearth, and drawing the logs together. "There's a cheerful blaze for you. Don't give way to sad thoughts on the first day of the year, Belle: it's a bad beginning."

"I have been thinking of your dear mother, Leonard: *my* mother, for she has been more to me than one mother in a hundred is to her daughter. She is with us to-day—a part of our lives—very frail and feeble, but still our own. Where will she be next New Year's day?"

"Ah, Belle, that's a bad look out for both of us," answered Leonard, seating himself in his mother's empty chair. "I'm afraid she won't last out the year that begins to-day. But she has seemed brighter and happier lately, hasn't she?"

"Yes, I think she has been happier," said Christabel.

"Do you know why?"

His cousin did not answer him. She sat with her face bent over her dog, hiding her tears on Randie's sleek black head.

"I think I know why the mother has been so tranquil in her mind lately, Belle," said Leonard, with unusual earnestness, "and I think you know just as well as I do. She has seen you and me more friendly together—more cousinly—and she has looked forward to the fulfilment of an old wish and dream of hers. She has looked for the speedy realization of that wish, Belle, although six months ago it seemed hopeless. She wants to see the two people she loves best on earth united, before she is taken away. It would make the close of her life

happy, if she could see my happiness secure. I believe you know that, Belle."

" Yes, I know that it is so. But that can never be."

" That is a hard saying, Christabel. Half a year ago I asked you a question, and you said no. Many a man in my position would have been too proud to run the risk of a second refusal. He would have gone away in a huff and found comfort somewhere else. But I knew that there was only one woman in the world who could make me happy, and I waited for her. You must own that I have been patient, have I not, Belle?"

" You have been very devoted to your dear mother—very good to me. I cannot deny that, Leonard," Christabel answered gravely.

She had dried her tears, and lifted her head from the dog's neck, and sat looking straight at the fire, self-possessed and sad. It seemed to her as if all possibility of happiness had gone out of her life.

" Am I to have no reward?" asked Leonard. " You know with what hope I have waited—you know that our marriage would make my mother

happy, that it would make the end of her life a festival. You owe me nothing, but you owe her something. That is sueing *in formâ pauperis*, isn't it, Belle? But I have no pride where you are concerned."

"You ask me to be your wife; you don't even ask if I love you," said Christabel, bitterly. "What if I were to say yes, and then tell you afterwards that my heart still belongs to Angus Hamleigh."

"You had better tell me that now, if it is so," said Leonard, his face darkening in the firelight.

"Then I will tell you that it is so. I gave him up because I thought it my duty to give him up. I believed that in honour he belonged to another woman. I believe so still. But I have never left off loving him. That is why I have made up my mind never to marry."

"You are wise," retorted Leonard, "such a confession as that would settle for most men. But it does not settle for me, Belle. I am too far gone. If you are a fool about Hamleigh, I am a fool about you. Only say you will marry me, and I will take my chance of all the rest. I know you will be a good wife; and I will be a good husband to you. And I

suppose in the end you will get to care for me, a little. One thing is certain, that I can't be happy without you; so I would gladly run the risk of an occasional taste of misery with you. Come, Belle, is it a bargain," he pleaded, taking her unresisting hands. "Say that it is, dearest. Let me kiss the future mistress of Mount Royal."

He bent over her and kissed her—kissed those lips which had once been sacred to Angus Hamleigh, which she had sworn in her heart should be kissed by no other man upon earth. She recoiled from him with a shiver of disgust—no good omen for their wedded bliss.

"This will make our mother very happy," said Leonard. "Come to her now, Belle, and let us tell her."

Christabel went with slow, reluctant steps, ashamed of the weakness which had yielded to persuasion and not to duty. But when Mrs. Tregonell heard the news from the triumphant lover, the light of happiness that shone upon the wan face was almost an all-sufficing reward for this last sacrifice.

"My love, my love," cried the widow, clasping her niece to her breast. "You have made my last earthly days happy. I have thought you cold and hard. I feared that I should die before you relented; but now you have made me glad and grateful. I reared you for this, I taught you for this, I have prayed for this ever since you were a child. I have prayed that my son might have a pure and perfect wife: and God has granted my prayer."

After this came a period of such perfect content and tranquillity for the invalid, that Christabel forgot her own sorrows. She lived in an atmosphere of gladness; congratulations, gifts, were pouring in upon her every day; her aunt petted and cherished her, was never weary of praising and caressing her. Leonard was all submission as a lover. Major Bree was delighted at the security which this engagement promised for the carrying on of the line of Champernownes and Tregonells—the union of two fine estates. He had looked forward to a dismal period when the widow would be laid in her grave, her son a wanderer, and Christabel a resident at Plymouth or Bath; while spiders wove their webs

in shadowy corners of the good old Manor House, and mice, to all appearance self-sustaining, scampered and scurried behind the panelling.

Jessie Bridgeman was the only member of Christabel's circle who refrained from any expression of approval.

"Did I not tell you that you must end by marrying him?" she exclaimed. "Did I not say that if you stayed here the thing was inevitable? Continual dropping will wear away a stone; the stone is a fixture and can't help being dropped upon; but if you had stuck to your colours and gone to Leipsic to study the piano, you would have escaped the dropping."

As there was no possible reason for delay, while there was a powerful motive for a speedy marriage, in the fact of Mrs. Tregonell's precarious health, and her ardent desire to see her son and her niece united before her fading eyes closed for ever upon earth and earthly cares, Christabel was fain to consent to the early date which her aunt and her lover proposed, and to allow all arrangements to be hurried on with that view.

So in the dawning of the year, when Proserpine's returning footsteps were only faintly indicated by pale snowdrops and early violets lurking in sheltered hedges, and by the gold and purple of crocuses in all the cottage gardens, Christabel put on her wedding gown, and whiter than the pale ivory tint of the soft sheeny satin, took her seat in the carriage beside her adopted mother, to be driven down into the valley, and up the hilly street, where all the inhabitants of Boscastle—save those who had gone on before to congregate by the lich-gate —were on the alert to see the bride go by.

Mrs. Tregonell was paler than her niece, the fine regular features blanched with that awful pallor which tells of disease—but her eyes were shining with the light of gladness.

"My darling," she murmured, as they drove down to the harbour bridge, "I have loved you all your life, but never as I love you to-day. My dearest, you have filled my soul with content."

"I thank God that it should be so," faltered Christabel.

"If I could only see you smile, dear," said

her aunt. "Your expression is too sad for a bride."

"Is it, Auntie? But marriage is a serious thing, dear. It means the dedication of a life to duty."

"Duty which affection will make very light, I hope," said Mrs. Tregonell, chilled by the cold statuesque face, wrapped in its cloudy veil. "Christabel, my love, tell me that you are not unhappy—that this marriage is not against your inclination. It is of your own free will that you give yourself to my boy?"

"Yes, of my own free will," answered Christabel, firmly.

As she spoke, it flashed upon her that Iphigenia would have given the same answer before they led her to the altar of offended Artemis. There are sacrifices offered with the victim's free consent, which are not the less sacrifices.

"Look, dear," cried her aunt, as the children, clustering at the school-house gate—dismissed from school an hour before their time—waved their sturdy arms, and broke into a shrill treble cheer, "everybody is pleased at this marriage."

"If you are glad, dearest, I am content," murmured her niece.

It was a very quiet wedding—or a wedding which ranks among quiet weddings now-a-days, when nuptial ceremonies are for the most part splendid. No train of bridesmaids in æsthetic colours, Duchess of Devonshire hats, and long mittens—no page-boys, staggering under gigantic baskets of flowers—no fuss or fashion, to make that solemn ceremony a raree-show for the gaping crowd. The Rector of Trevalga's two little girls were the only bridesmaids—dressed after Sir Joshua, in short-waisted dove-coloured frocks and pink sashes, mob caps and mittens, with big bunches of primroses and violets in their chubby hands.

Mrs. Tregonell looked superb in a dark ruby velvet gown, and long mantle of the same rich stuff, bordered with darkest sable. It was she who gave her niece away, while Major Bree acted as best man for Leonard. There were no guests at this winter wedding. Mrs. Tregonell's frail health was a sufficent reason for the avoidance of all pomp and

show; and Christabel had pleaded earnestly for a very quiet wedding.

So before that altar where she had hoped to pledge herself for life and till death to Angus Hamleigh, Christabel gave her submissive hand to Leonard Tregonell, while the fatal words were spoken which have changed and blighted some few lives, to set against the many they have blessed and glorified. Still deadly pale, the bride went with the bridegroom to the vestry, to sign that book of fate, the register, Mrs. Tregonell following on Major Bree's arm, Miss Bridgeman—a neat little figure in silver grey poplin—and the child bride-maids crowding in after them, until the small vestry was filled with a gracious group, all glow of colour and sheen of silk and satin, in the glad spring sunshine.

"Now, Mrs. Tregonell," said the Major, cheerily, when the bride and bridegroom had signed, "let us have your name next, if you please; for I don't think there is any of us who more rejoices in this union than you do."

The widow took the pen, and wrote her name below

that of Christabel, with a hand that never faltered. The incumbent of Minster used to say afterwards that this autograph was the grandest in the register. But the pen dropped suddenly from the hand that had guided it so firmly. Mrs. Tregonell looked round at the circle of faces with a strange wild look in her own. She gave a faint half-stifled cry, and fell upon her son's breast, her arms groping about his shoulders feebly, as if they would fain have wound themselves round his neck, but could not, encumbered by the heavy mantle.

Leonard put his arm round her, and held her firmly to his breast.

"Dear mother, are you ill?" he asked, alarmed by that strange look in the haggard face.

"It is the end," she faltered. "Don't be sorry, dear. I am so happy."

And thus, with a shivering sigh, the weary heart throbbed its last dull beat, the faded eyes grew dim, the lips were dumb for ever.

The Rector tried to get Christabel out of the vestry before she could know what had happened—but the bride was clinging to her aunt's lifeless

figure, half sustained in Leonard's arms, half resting on the chair which had been pushed forward to support her as she sank upon her son's breast. Vain to seek to delay the knowledge of sorrow. All was known to Christabel already, as she bent over that marble face which was scarcely whiter than her own.

CHAPTER VII.

"NOT THE GODS CAN SHAKE THE PAST."

THERE was a sad silent week of waiting before the bride set forth upon her bridal tour, robed in deepest mourning. For six days the windows of Mount Royal were darkened, and Leonard and his newly wedded wife kept within the shadow of that house of death, almost as strictly as if they had been Jewish mourners, bound by ancient ceremonial laws, whereof the close observance is a kind of patriotism among a people who have no fatherland. All the hot-houses at Mount Royal gave out their treasures—white hyacinths, and rose-flushed cyclamen, gardenia, waxen camellias, faint Dijon roses—for the adornment of the death chamber. The corridor outside that darkened room had an odour of hot-house flowers. The house, folded in silence and darkness, felt like some splendid sepulchre. Leonard was deeply depressed by his mother's death; more shocked by

its suddenness, by this discordant note in his triumphant marriage song, than by the actual fact; this loss having been long discounted in his own mind among the evils of the future.

Christabel's grief was terrible, albeit she had lived for the last year in constant fear of this affliction. Its bitterness was in no wise lessened because it had been long expected. Never even in her saddest moments had she realized the agony of that parting, the cold dull sense of loneliness, of dismal abandonment, in a loveless, joyless, world, when that one beloved friend was taken from her. Leonard tried his best to console her, putting aside his own sorrow, in the endeavour to comfort his bride; but his efforts at consolation were not happy, for the most part taking the form of philosophical truisms which may be very good in an almanack, or as padding for a country newspaper, but which sound dull and meaningless to the ear of the mourner who says in his heart there was never any sorrow like unto my sorrow.

In the low sunlight of the March afternoon they laid Mrs. Tregonell's coffin in the family vault, beside the niche where her faithful husband of ten years'

wedded life took his last long rest. There, in the darkness, the perfume of many flowers mixing with the cold earthy odours of the tomb, they left her who had so long been the despotic mistress of Mount Royal; and then they drove back to the empty house, where the afternoon light that streamed in through newly opened windows had a garish look, as if it had no right to be there.

The widow's will was of the simplest. She left legacies to the old servants; her wardrobe, with the exception of laces and furs, to Dormer; mementoes to a few old friends; two thousand pounds in trust for certain small local charities; to Christabel all her jewels and books; and to her son everything else of which she died possessed. He was now by inheritance from his mother, and in right of his wife, master of the Champernowne estate, which, united to the Tregonell property, made him one of the largest landowners in the West of England. Christabel's fortune had been strictly settled on herself before her marriage, with reversion to Leonard in the failure of children; but the fact of this settlement, to which he had readily agreed, did not lessen

Leonard's sense of importance as representative of the Tregonells and Champernownes.

Christabel and her husband started for the Continent on the day after the funeral, Leonard fervently hoping that change of scene and constant movement would help his wife to forget her grief. It was a dreary departure for a honeymoon tour—the sombre dress of bride and bridegroom, the doleful visage of Dormer, the late Mrs. Tregonell's faithful maid, whom the present Mrs. Tregonell retained for her own service, glad to have a person about her who had so dearly loved the dead. They travelled to Weymouth, crossed to Cherbourg, and thence to Paris, and on without stopping to Bordeaux; then, following the line southward, they visited all the most interesting towns of southern France—Albi, Montauban, Toulouse, Carcassonne, Narbonne, Montpellier, Nismes, and so to the fairy-like shores of the Mediterranean, lingering on their way to look at mediæval cathedrals, Roman baths and amphitheatres, citadels, prisons, palaces, aqueducts, all somewhat dry-as-dust and tiresome to Leonard, but full of interest to Christabel, who forgot her

own griefs as she pored over these relics of pagan and Christian history.

Nice was in all its glory of late spring when, after a lingering progress, they arrived at that Brighton of the south. It was nearly six weeks since that March sunset which had lighted the funeral procession in Minster Churchyard, and Christabel was beginning to grow accustomed to the idea of her aunt's death—nay, had begun to look back with a dim sense of wonder at the happy time in which they two had been together, their love unclouded by any fear of doom and parting. That last year of Mrs. Tregonell's life had been Christabel's apprenticeship to grief. All the gladness and thoughtlessness of youth had been blighted by the knowledge of an inevitable parting—a farewell that must soon be spoken—a dear hand clasped fondly to-day, but which must be let go to-morrow.

Under that soft southern sky a faint bloom came back to Christabel's cheeks, which had not until now lost the wan whiteness they had worn on her wedding-day. She grew more cheerful, talked brightly and pleasantly to her husband, and put off

the aspect of gloom with the heavy crape-shrouded gown which marked the first period of her mourning. She came down to dinner one evening in a gown of rich lustreless black silk, with a cluster of Cape jasmine among the folds of her white crape fichu, whereat Leonard rejoiced exceedingly, his being one of those philosophic minds which believe that the too brief days of the living should never be frittered away upon lamentations for the dead.

"You're looking uncommonly jolly, Belle," said Leonard, as his wife took her seat at the little table in front of an open window overlooking the blue water and the amphitheatre of hills, glorified by the sunset. They were dining at a private table in the public room of the hotel, Leonard having a fancy for the life and bustle of the table d'hôte rather than the seclusion of his own apartments. Christabel hated sitting down with a herd of strangers; so, by way of compromise, they dined at their own particular table, and looked on at the public banquet, as at a stage-play enacted for their amusement.

There were others who preferred the exclusiveness

of a separate table: among these two middle-aged men—one military, both new arrivals—who sat within earshot of Mr. and Mrs. Tregonell.

" That's a fascinating get-up, Belle," pursued Leonard, proud of his wife's beauty, and not displeased at a few respectful glances from the men at the neighbouring table which that beauty had elicited. " By-the-by, why shouldn't we go to the opera to-night? They do ' Traviata ;' none of your Wagner stuff, but one of the few operas a fellow *can* understand. It will cheer you up a bit."

" Thank you, Leonard. You are very good to think of it; but I had rather not go to any place of amusement—this year."

" That's rank rubbish, Belle. What can it matter—here, where nobody knows us? And do you suppose it can make any difference to my poor mother? Her sleep will be none the less tranquil."

" I know that: but it pleases me to honour her memory. I will go to the opera as often as you like next year, Leonard."

" You may go or stay away, so far as I'm concerned," answered Leonard, with a sulky air. " I

only suggested the thing on your account. I hate their squalling."

This was not the first time that Mr. Tregonell had shown the cloven foot during that prolonged honeymoon. He was not actually unkind to his wife. He indulged her fancies for the most part, even when they went counter to his; he would have loaded her with gifts, had she been willing to accept them; he was the kind of spouse who, in the estimation of the outside world, passes as a perfect husband—proud, fond, indulgent, lavish—just the kind of husband whom a sensuous, selfish woman would consider absolutely adorable from a practical standpoint; supplementing him, perhaps, with the ideal, in the person of a lover.

So far, Christabel's wedded life had gone smoothly; for in the measure of her sacrifice she had included obedience and duty after marriage. Yet there was not an hour in which she did not feel the utter want of sympathy between her and the man she had married—not a day in which she did not discover his inability to understand her, to think as she thought, to see as she saw. Religion, conscience,

honour—for all these husband and wife had a different standard. That which was right to one was wrong to the other. Their sense of the beautiful, their estimation of art, were as wide apart as earth and heaven. How could any union prove happy—how could there be even that smooth peacefulness which blesses some passionless unions—when the husband and wife were of so different a clay? Long as Leonard had known and loved his cousin, he was no more at home with her than he would have been with Undine, or with that ivory image which Aphrodite warmed into life at the prayer of Pygmalion the sculptor.

More than once during these six weeks of matrimony Leonard had betrayed a jealous temper, which threatened evil in the future. His courtship had been one long struggle at self-repression. Marriage gave him back his liberty, and he used it on more than one occasion to sneer at his wife's former lover, or at her fidelity to a cancelled vow. Christabel had understood his meaning only too well; but she had heard him in a scornful silence which was more humiliating than any other form of reproof.

After that offer of the opera, Mr. Tregonell lapsed into silence. His subjects for conversation were not widely varied, and his present position, aloof from all sporting pursuits, and poorly provided with the London papers, reduced him almost to dumbness. Just now he was silent from temper, and went on sulkily with his dinner, pretending to be absorbed by consideration of the wines and dishes, most of which he pronounced abominable.

When he had finished his dinner, he took out his cigarette case, and went out on the balcony to smoke, leaving Christabel sitting alone at her little table.

The two Englishmen at the table in the next window were talking in a comfortable, genial kind of way, and in voices quite loud enough to be overheard by their immediate neighbours. The soldier-like man sat back to back with Christabel, and she could not avoid hearing the greater part of his conversation.

She heard with listless ears, neither understanding nor interested in understanding the drift of his talk—her mind far away in the home she had left,

a desolate and ruined home, as it seemed to her, now that her aunt was dead. But by-and-by the sound of a too familiar name rivetted her attention.

"Angus Hamleigh, yes! I saw his name in the visitor's book. He was here last month—gone on to Italy," said the soldier.

"You knew him?" asked the other.

"*Dans le temps.* I saw a good deal of him when he was about town."

"Went a mucker, didn't he?"

"I believe he spent a good deal of money—but he never belonged to an out-and-out fast lot. Went in for art and literature, and that kind of thing, don't you know? Garrick Club, behind the scenes at the swell theatres—Richmond and Greenwich dinners—Maidenhead—Henley—lived in a house-boat one summer, men used to go down by the last train to moonlit suppers after the play. He had some very good ideas, and carried them out on a large scale—but he never dropped money on cards, or racing—rather looked down upon the amusements of the million. By-the-by I was at rather a curious wedding just before I left London."

"Whose?"

"Little Fishky's. The Colonel came up to time, at last."

"Fishky," interrogated the civilian vaguely.

"Don't you know Fishky, alias Psyche, the name by which Stella Mayne condescended to be known by her intimate friends, during the run of 'Cupid and Psyche.' Colonel Luscomb married her last week at St. George's, and I was at the wedding."

"Rather feeble of him, wasn't it?" asked the civilian.

"Well, you see, he could hardly sink himself lower than he had done already by his infatuation for the lady. He knew that all his chances at the Horseguards were gone; so if a plain gold ring could gratify a young person who had been surfeited with diamonds, why should our friend withhold that simple and inexpensive ornament? Whether the lady and gentleman will be any the happier for this rehabilitation of their domestic circumstances, is a question that can only be answered in the future. The wedding was decidedly queer."

"In what way?"

"It was a case of vaulting ambition which o'erleaps itself. The Colonel wanted a quiet wedding. I think he would have preferred the registrar's office—no church-going, or fuss of any kind—but the lady, to whom matrimony was a new idea, willed otherwise. So she decided that the nest in St. John's Wood was not spacious enough to accommodate the wedding guests. She sent her invitations far and wide, and ordered a *recherché* breakfast at an hotel in Brook Street. Of the sixty people she expected about fifteen appeared, and there was a rowdy air about those select few, male and female, which was by no means congenial to the broad glare of day. Night birds, every one—painted cheeks—dyed moustachios—tremulous hands—a foreshadowing of del. trem. in the very way some of them swallowed their champagne. I was sorry for Fishky, who looked lovely in her white satin frock and orange-blossoms, but who had a piteous droop about the corners of her lips, like a child whose birthday feast has gone wrong. I felt still sorrier for the Colonel—a proud man debased by low surroundings."

"He will take her off the stage, I suppose," suggested the other.

"Naturally, he will try to do so. He'll make a good fight for it, I dare say; but whether he can keep Fishky from the footlights is an open question. I know he's in debt, and I don't very clearly see how they are to live."

"She is very fond of him, isn't she?"

"Yes, I believe so. She jilted Hamleigh, a man who worshipped her, to take up with Luscomb, so I suppose it was a case of real affection."

"I was told that she was in very bad health—consumptive?"

"That sort of little person is always dying," answered the other carelessly. "It is a part of the *métier*—the Marguerite Gauthier, drooping lily kind of young woman. But I believe this one *is* sickly."

Christabel heard every word of this conversation, heard and understood for the first time that her renunciation of her lover had been useless—that the reparation she had deemed it his duty to make, was past making—that the woman to whose wounded character she had sacrificed her own happiness

was false and unworthy. She had been fooled—betrayed by her own generous instincts—her own emotional impulses. It would have been better for her and for Angus if she had been more worldly-minded—less innocent of the knowledge of evil. She had blighted her own life, and perhaps his, for an imaginary good. Nothing had been gained to any one living by her sacrifice.

"I thought I was doing my duty," she told herself helplessly, as she sat looking out at the dark water, above which the moon was rising in the cloudless purple of a southern night. "Oh! how wicked that woman was to hide the truth from me—to let me sacrifice my love and my lover—knowing her own falsehood all the time. And now she is the wife of another man! How she must have laughed at my folly! I thought it was Angus who had deserted her, and that if I gave him up, his own honourable feeling would lead him to atone for that past wrong. And now I know that no good has been done—only infinite evil."

She thought of Angus, a lonely wanderer on the face of the earth; jilted by the first woman he had

loved, renounced by the second, with no close ties of kindred—uncared for and alone. It was hard for her to think of this, whose dearest hope had once been to devote her life to caring for him and cherishing him—prolonging that frail existence by the tender ministrations of a boundless love. She pictured him in his loneliness, careless of his health, wasting his brief remnant of life—reckless, hopeless, indifferent.

"God grant he may fall in love with some good woman, who will cherish him as I would have done," was her unselfish prayer; for she knew that domestic affection is the only spell that can prolong a fragile life.

It was a weak thing no doubt next morning, when she was passing through the hall of the hotel, to stop at the desk on which the visitors' book was kept, and to look back through the signatures of the last three weeks for that one familiar autograph which she had such faint chance of ever seeing again in the future. How boldly that one name seemed to stand out from the page; and even coming upon it after a deliberate search, what a

thrill it sent through her veins! The signature was as firm as of old. She tried to think that this was an indication of health and strength—but later in the same day, when she was alone in her sitting-room, and her tea was brought to her by a German waiter—one of those superior men whom it is hard to think of as a menial—she ventured to ask a question.

"There was an English gentleman staying here about three weeks ago: a Mr. Hamleigh. Do you remember him?" she asked.

The waiter interrogated himself silently for half a minute, and then replied in the affirmative.

"Was he an invalid?"

"Not quite an invalid, Madame. He went out a little—but he did not seem robust. He never went to the opera—or to any public entertainment. He rode a little—and drove a little—and read a great deal. He was much fonder of books than most English gentlemen."

"Do you know where he went when he left here?"

"He was going to the Italian lakes."

Christabel asked no further question. It seemed to her a great privilege to have heard even so much as this. There was very little hope that in her road of life she would often come so nearly on her lost lover's footsteps. She was too wise to desire that they should ever meet face to face—that she, Leonard's wife, should ever again be moved by the magic of that voice, thrilled by the pathos of those dreamy eyes; but it was a privilege to hear something about him she had lost, to know what spot of earth held him, what skies looked down upon him.

CHAPTER VIII.

"I HAVE PUT MY DAYS AND DREAMS OUT OF MIND."

It was the end of May, when Christabel and her husband went back to England and to Mount Royal. Leonard wanted to stay in London for the season, and to participate in the amusements and dissipation of that golden time; but this his wife most steadfastly refused. She would be guilty of no act which could imply want of respect for her beloved dead. She would not make her curtsy to her sovereign in her new character of a matron, or go into society, within the year of her aunt's death.

"You will be horribly moped in Cornwall," remonstrated Leonard. "Everything about the place will remind you of my poor mother. We shall be in the dolefuls all the year."

"I would rather grieve for her, than forget her," answered Christabel. "It is too easy to forget."

"Well, you must have your own way, I suppose.

You generally do," retorted Leonard, churlishly; "and, after having dragged me about a lot of mouldy old French towns, and made me look at churches, and Roman baths, and the sites of ancient circuses, until I hated the very name of antiquity, you will expect me to vegetate at Mount Royal for the next six months."

"I don't see any reason why a quiet life should be mere vegetation," said Christabel; "but if you would prefer to spend part of the year in London I can stay at Mount Royal."

"And get on uncommonly well without me," cried Leonard. "I perfectly comprehend your meaning. But I am not going in for that kind of thing. You and I must not offer the world another example of the semi-attached couple; or else people might begin to say you had married a man you did not care for."

"I will try and make your life as agreeable as I can at the Manor, Leonard," Christabel answered, with supreme equanimity—it was an aggravation to her husband that she so rarely lost her temper—"so long as you do not ask me to fill the house

with visitors, or to do anything that might look like want of reverence for your mother's memory."

"Look!" ejaculated Leonard. "What does it matter how things look? We both know that we are sorry for having lost her—that we shall miss her more or less every day of our lives—visitors or no visitors. However, you needn't invite any people. I can rub on with a little fishin' and boatin'."

They went back to Mount Royal, where all things had gone as if by clockwork during their absence, under Miss Bridgeman's sage administration. To relieve her loneliness, Christabel had invited two of the younger sisters from Shepherd's Bush to spend the spring months at the Manor House—and these damsels—tall, vigorous, active—had revelled exceedingly in all the luxuries and pleasures of a rural life under the most advantageous circumstances. They had scoured the hills—had rifled the hedges of their abundant wild flowers—had made friends with all Christabel's chosen families in the surrounding cottages—had fallen in love with the curate who was doing duty at Minster and Forrabury—had been buffeted by

the winds and tossed by the waves in many a delightful boating excursion—had climbed the rocky steeps of Tintagel so often that they seemed to know every stone of that ruined citadel—and now had gone home to Shepherd's Bush, their cheeks bright with country bloom, and their meagre trunks overshadowed by a gigantic hamper of country produce.

Christabel felt a bitter pang as the carriage drew up to the porch, and she saw the neat little figure in a black gown waiting to receive her—thinking of that tall and noble form which should have stood there—the welcoming arms which should have received her, rewarding and blessing her for her self-sacrifice. The sacrifice had been made, but death had swallowed up the blessing and reward: and in that intermediate land of slumber where the widow lay there could be no knowledge of gain—no satisfaction in the thought of her son's happiness: even granting that Leonard was supremely happy in his marriage, a fact which Christabel deemed open to doubt. No, there had been nothing gained, except that Diana Tregonell's last days had been full of

peace—her one cherished hope realized on the very threshold of the tomb. Christabel tried to take comfort from this knowledge.

"If I had denied her to the last, if she had died with her wish ungratified, I think I should be still more sorry for her loss," she told herself.

There was bitter pain in the return to a home where that one familiar figure had been the central point, the very axis of life. Jessie led the new Mrs. Tregonell into the panelled parlour, where every object was arranged just as in the old days; the tea-table on the left of the wide fireplace, the large low armchair and the book-table on the right. The room was bright with white and crimson may, azaleas, tea-roses.

"I thought it was best for you to get accustomed to the rooms without her," said Jessie, in a low voice, as she placed Christabel in the widow's old chair, and helped to take off her hat and mantle, "and I thought you would not like anything changed."

"Not for worlds. The house is a part of her, in my mind. It was she who planned everything as

it now is—just adding as many new things as were needful to brighten the old. I will never alter a detail unless I am absolutely obliged."

"I am so thankful to hear you say that. Major Bree is coming to dinner. He wanted to be among the first to welcome you. I hope you don't mind my having told him he might come."

"I shall be very glad to see him: he is a part of my old life here. I hope he is very well."

"Splendid—the soul of activity and good temper. I can't tell you how good he was to my sisters—taking them about everywhere. I believe they both went away deeply in love with him; or at least, with their affections divided between him and Mr. Ponsonby."

Mr. Ponsonby was the curate, a bachelor, and of pleasing appearance.

Leonard had submitted reluctantly to the continued residence of Miss Bridgeman at Mount Royal. He had been for dismissing her, as a natural consequence of his mother's death; but here again Christabel had been firm.

"Jessie is my only intimate friend," she said,

"and she is associated with every year of my girlhood. She shall be no trouble to you, Leonard, and she will help me to save your money."

This last argument had a softening effect. Mr. Tregonell knew that Jessie Bridgeman was a good manager. He had affected to despise her economies while it was his mother's purse which was spared; but now that the supplies were drawn from his own resources he was less disposed to be contemptuous of care in the administrator of his household.

Major Bree was in the drawing-room when Christabel came down dressed for dinner, looking delicately lovely in her flowing gown of soft dull black, with white flowers and white crape about her neck. The Major's cheerful presence did much to help Mr. Tregonell and his wife through that first dinner at Mount Royal. He had so many small local events to tell them about, news too insignificant to be recorded in Jessie's letters, but not without interest for Christabel, who loved place and people. Then after dinner he begged his hostess to play, declaring that he had not heard any good music during her absence, and Christabel, who had

cultivated her musical talents assiduously in every interval of loneliness and leisure which had occurred in the course of her bridal tour, was delighted to play to a listener who could understand and appreciate the loftiest flights in harmony.

The Major was struck with the improvement in her style. She had always played sweetly, but not with this breadth and power.

"You must have worked very hard in these last few months," he said.

"Yes, I made the best use of every opportunity. I had some lessons from a very clever German professor at Nice. Music kept me from brooding on my loss," she added, in a low voice.

"I hope you will not grow less industrious now you have come home," said the Major. "Most women give Mozart and Beethoven to the winds when they marry, shut up their piano altogether, or at most aspire to play a waltz for their children's dancing."

"I shall not be one of those. Music will be my chief pursuit—now."

The Major felt that although this was a very

proper state of things from an artistic point of view, it argued hardly so well for the chances of matrimonial bliss. That need of a pursuit after marriage indicated a certain emptiness in the existence of the wife. A life closed and rounded in the narrow circle of a wedding ring hardly leaves room for the assiduous study of art.

And now began for Christabel a life which seemed to her to be in some wise a piece of mechanism, an automatic performance of daily recurring duties, an hourly submission to society which had no charm for her—a life which would have hung as heavily upon her spirit as the joyless monotony of a convict prison, had it not been for the richness of her own mental resources, and her love of the country in which she lived. She could not be altogether unhappy roaming with her old friend Jessie over those wild romantic hills, or facing the might of that tremendous ocean, grand and somewhat awful even in its calmest aspect. Nor was she unhappy seated in her own snug morning-room among the books she loved—books which were always opening new worlds of thought and wonder, books of such

inexhaustible interest that she was often inclined to give way to absolute despair at the idea of how much of this world's wisdom must remain unexplored even at the end of a long life. De Quincey has shown by figures that not the hardest reader can read half the good old books that are worth reading; to say nothing of those new books daily claiming to be read.

No, for a thoroughly intellectual woman, loving music, loving the country, tender and benevolent to the poor, such a life as Christabel was called upon to lead in this first year of marriage could not be altogether unhappy. Here were two people joined by the strongest of all human ties, and yet utterly unsympathetic; but they were not always in each other's company, and when they were together the wife did her best to appear contented with her lot, and to make life agreeable to her husband. She was more punctilious in the performance of every duty she owed him than she would have been had she loved him better. She never forgot that his welfare was a charge which she had taken upon herself to please the kinswoman to whom she owed

so much. The debt was all the more sacred since she to whom it was due had passed away to the land where there is no knowledge of earthly conduct.

The glory of summer grew and faded, the everlasting hills changed with all the varying lights and shadows of autumn and winter; and in the tender early spring, when all the trees were budding, and the hawthorn hedges were unfolding crinkly green leaves among the brown, Christabel's heart melted with the new strange emotion of maternal love. A son was born to the lord of the manor; and while all Boscastle rejoiced at this imimportant addition to the population, Christabel's pale face shone with a new radiance, as the baby-face looked up at her from the pillow by her side—eyes clear and star-like, with a dreamy, far-away gaze, which was almost more lovely than the recognizing looks of older eyes—a being hardly sentient of the things of earth, but bright with memories of the spirit world.

The advent of this baby-boy gave a new impulse to Christabel's life. She gave herself up to these

new cares and duties with intense devotion; and for the next six months of her life was so entirely engrossed by her child that Leonard considered himself neglected. She deferred her presentation at Court till the next season, and Leonard was compelled to be satisfied with an occasional brief holiday in London, during which he naturally relapsed into the habits of his bachelor days—dined and gamed at the old clubs, and went about everywhere with his friend and ally, Jack Vandeleur.

Christabel had been married two years, and her boy was a year old, when she went back to the old house in Bolton Row with her husband, to enjoy her second season of fashionable pleasures. How hard it was to return, under such altered circumstances, to the rooms in which she had been so happy—to see everything unchanged except her own life. The very chairs and tables seemed to be associated with old joys, old griefs. All the sharp agony of that bitter day on which she had made up her mind to renounce Angus Hamleigh came back to her as she looked round the room in which the pain had been suffered. The flavour of old memo-

ries was mixed with all the enjoyments of the present. The music she heard this year was the same music they two had heard together. And here was this smiling Park, all green leaves and sunlight, filled with this seeming frivolous crowd; in almost every detail the scene they two had contemplated, amused and philosophical, four years ago.

The friends who called on her and invited her now, were the same people among whom she had visited during her first season. People who had been enraptured at her engagement to Mr. Hamleigh were equally delighted at her marriage with her cousin, or at least said so; albeit, more than one astute matron drove away from Bolton Row sighing over the folly of marriage between first cousins, and marvelling that Christabel's baby was not deaf, blind, or idiotic.

Among other old acquaintance, young Mrs. Tregonell met the Dowager Lady Cumberbridge, at a great dinner, more Medusa-like than ever, in a curly auburn wig after Madame de Montespan, and a diamond coronet. Christabel shrank from the too-well-remembered figure with a faint shudder; but

Lady Cumberbridge swooped upon her like an elderly hawk, when the ladies were on their way back to the drawing-room, and insisted upon being friendly.

"My dear child, where have you been hiding yourself all these years?" she exclaimed, in her fine baritone. "I saw your marriage in the papers, and your poor aunt's death; and I was expecting to meet you and your husband in society last season. You didn't come to town? A baby, I suppose? Just so! Those horrid babies! In the coming century there will be some better arrangement for carrying on the species. How well you are looking, and your husband is positively charming. He sat next me at dinner, and we were friends in a moment. How proud he is of you! It is quite touching to see a man so devoted to his wife; and now"—they were in the subdued light of the drawing-room by this time, light judiciously tempered by ruby-coloured Venetian glass—"now tell me all about my poor friend. Was she long ill?"

And, with a ghoulish interest in horrors, the dowager prepared herself for a detailed narration of

Mrs. Tregonell's last illness; but Christabel could only falter out a few brief sentences. Even now she could hardly speak of her aunt without tears; and it was painful to talk of her to this worldly dowager, with keen eyes glittering under penthouse brows, and a hard, eager mouth.

In all that London season, Christabel only once heard her old lover's name, carelessly mentioned at a dinner party. He was talked of as a guest at some diplomatic dinner at St. Petersburg, early in the year.

CHAPTER IX.

"AND PALE FROM THE PAST WE DRAW NIGH THEE."

It was October, and the chestnut leaves were falling slowly and heavily in the park at Mount Royal, the oaks upon the hill side were faintly tinged with bronze and gold, while the purple bloom of the heather and the yellow flower of the gorse were seen in rarer patches amidst the sober tints of autumn. It was the time at which to some eyes this Cornish coast was most lovely, with a subdued poetic loveliness—a dreamy beauty touched with tender melancholy.

Mount Royal was delightful at this season. Liberal fires in all the rooms filled the old oak panelled house with a glow of colour, and a sense of ever-present warmth that was very comfortable after the sharpness of October breezes. Those greenhouses and hothouses, which had been for so many years Mrs. Tregonell's perpetual care, now

disgorged their choicest contents. Fragile white and yellow asters, fairy-like ferns, Dijon roses, lilies of the valley, stephanotis, mignonette, and Cape jasmine filled the rooms with perfume. Modern blinds of diapered crimson and grey subdued the light of those heavily mullioned windows which had been originally designed with a view to strength and architectural effect, rather than to the admission of the greatest possible amount of daylight. The house at this season of the year seemed made for warmth, so thick the walls, so heavily curtained the windows; just as in the height of summer it seemed made for coolness. Christabel had respected all her aunt's ideas and prejudices: nothing had been changed since Mrs. Tregonell's death—save for that one sad fact that she was gone. The noble matronly figure, the handsome face, the kindly smile were missing from the house where the widow had so long reigned, an imperious but a beneficent mistress—having her own way in all things, but always considerate of other people's happiness and comfort.

Mr. Tregonell was inclined to be angry with his

wife sometimes for her religious adherence to her aunt's principles and opinions in things great and small.

"You are given over body and soul to my poor mother's fads," he said. "If it had not been for you I should have turned the house out of windows when she was gone—got rid of all the worm-eaten furniture, broken out new windows, and let in more light. One feels half asleep in a house where there is nothing but shadow and the scent of hothouse flowers. I should have given *carte blanche* to some London man—the fellow who writes verses, and who invented the storks and sunflower style of decoration—and have let him refurnish the saloon and music-room, pitch out a library which nobody reads, and substitute half a dozen dwarf book-cases in gold and ebony, filled with brightly bound books, and with Japanese jars and bottles on the top of them to give life and colour to the oak panelling. I hate a gloomy house."

"Oh, Leonard, you surely would not call Mount Royal gloomy!"

"But I do: I hate a house that smells of one's ancestors."

"Just now you objected to the scent of the flowers."

"You are always catching me up—there was never such a woman to argue—but I mean what I say. The smell is a combination of stephanotis and old bones. I wish you would let me build you a villa at Torquay or Dartmouth. I think I should prefer Dartmouth: it's a better place for yachting."

"You are very kind, but I would rather live at Mount Royal than anywhere else. Remember I was brought up here."

"A reason for your being heartily sick of the house—as I am. But I suppose in your case there are associations—sentimental associations."

"The house is filled with memories of my second mother!"

"Yes—and there are other memories—associations which you love to nurse and brood upon. I think I know all about it—can read up your feelings to a nicety."

"You can think and say what you please, Leonard," she answered, looking at him with unaltered calmness, "but you will never make me disown my love of this place, and its surroundings. You will never make me ashamed of being fond of the home in which I have spent my life."

"I begin to think there is very little shame in you," Leonard muttered to himself, as he walked away.

He had said many bitter words to his wife—had aimed many a venomed arrow at her breast—but he had never made her blush, and he had never made her cry. There were times when a dull hopeless anger consumed him—anger against her—against Nature—against Fate—and when his only relief was to be found in harsh and bitter speech, in dark and sullen looks. It would have been a greater relief to him if his shots had gone home—if his brutality had elicited any sign of distress. But in this respect Christabel was heroic. She who had never harboured an ungenerous thought was moved only to a cold calm scorn by the unjust and ungenerous conduct of her husband. Her

contempt was too thorough for the possibility of resentment. Once, and once only, she attempted to reason with a fool in his folly.

"Why do you make these unkind speeches, Leonard?" she asked, looking at him with those calm eyes before which his were apt to waver and look downward, hardly able to endure that steady gaze. "Why are you always harping upon the past—as if it were an offence against you. Is there anything that you have to complain of in my conduct—have I given you any cause for anger?"

"Oh, no, none. You are simply perfect as a wife—everybody says so—and in the multitude of counsellors, you know. But it is just possible for perfection to be a trifle cold and unapproachable—to keep a man at arm's length—and to have an ever-present air of living in the past which is galling to a husband who would like—well—a little less amiability, and a little more affection. By Heaven, I wouldn't mind my wife being a devil, if I knew she was fond of me. A spitfire, who would kiss me one minute and claw me the next,

would be better than the calm superiority which is always looking over my head."

"Leonard, I don't think I have been wanting in affection. You have done a great deal to repel my liking—yes—since you force me to speak plainly—you have made my duty as a wife more difficult than it need have been. But, have I ever forgotten that you are my husband, and the father of my child? Is there any act of my life which has denied or made light of your authority? When you asked me to marry you I kept no secrets from you: I was perfectly frank."

"Devilish frank," muttered Leonard.

"You knew that I could not feel for you as I had felt for another. These things can come only once in a lifetime. You were content to accept my affection—my obedience—knowing this. Why do you make what I told you then a reproach against me now?"

He could not dispute the justice of this reproof.

"Well, Christabel, I was wrong, I suppose. It would have been more gentlemanlike to hold my

tongue. I ought to know that your first girlish fancy is a thing of the past—altogether gone and done with. It was idiotic to harp upon that worn-out string, wasn't it?" he asked, laughing awkwardly; "but when a man feels savage he must hit out at some one."

This was the only occasion on which husband and wife had ever spoken plainly of the past; but Leonard let fly those venomed arrows of his on the smallest provocation. He could not forget that his wife had loved another man better than she had ever loved or even pretended to love him. It was her candour which he felt most keenly. Had she been willing to play the hypocrite, to pretend a little, he would have been ever so much better pleased.

To the outside world, even to that narrow world which encircles an old family seat in the depths of the country, Mr. and Mrs. Tregonell appeared a happy couple, whose union was the most natural thing in the world, yet not without a touch of that romance which elevates and idealizes a marriage.

Were they not brought up under the same roof, boy and girl together, like, and yet not like, brother and sister. How inevitable that they must become devotedly attached. That little episode of Christabel's engagement to another man counted for nothing. She was so young—had never questioned her own heart. Her true love was away—and she was flattered by the attention of a man of the world like Angus Hamleigh—and so, and so—almost unawares, perhaps, she allowed herself to be engaged to him, little knowing the real bent of his character and the gulf into which she was about to plunge: for in the neighbourhood of Mount Royal it was believed that a man who had once lived as Mr. Hamleigh had lived was a soul lost for ever, a creature given over to ruin in this world and the next. There was no hopefulness in the local mind for the after career of such an offender.

At this autumn season, when Mount Royal was filled with visitors, all intent upon taking life pleasantly, it would have been impossible for a life to seem more prosperous and happy to the outward

eye than that of Christabel Tregonell. The centre of a friendly circle, the ornament of a picturesque and perfectly appointed house, the mother of a lovely boy whom she worshipped, with the overweening love of a young mother for her firstborn—admired, beloved by all her little world, with a husband who was proud of her and indulgent to her—who could deny that Mrs. Tregonell was a person to be envied.

Mrs. Fairfax Torrington, a widow, with a troublesome son, and a limited income—an income whose narrow boundary she was continually overstepping—told her hostess as much one morning when the men were all out on the hills in the rain, and the women made a wide circle round the library fire, some of them intent upon crewel work, others not even pretending to be industrious, the faithful Randie lying at his mistress's feet, as she sat in her favourite chair by the old carved chimney-piece—the chair which had been her aunt Diana's for so many peaceful years.

"There is a calmness—an assured tranquillity about your life which makes me hideously envious,"

said Mrs. Fairfax Torrington, waving the Society paper which she had been using as a screen against the fire, after having read the raciest of its paragraphs aloud, and pretended to be sorry for the dear friends at whom the censor's airy shafts were aimed. "I have stayed with duchesses and with millionaires—but I never envied either. The duchess is always dragged to death by the innumerable claims upon her time, her money, and her attention. Her life is very little better than the fate of that unfortunate person who stabbed one of the French Kings—forty wild horses pulling forty different ways. It doesn't make it much better because the horses are called by pretty names, don't you know. Court, friends, flower-shows, balls, church, opera, Ascot, fancy fairs, seat in Scotland, place in Yorkshire, Baden, Monaco. It is the pull that wears one out, the dreadful longing to be allowed to sit in one's own room by one's own fire, and rest. I know what it is in my small way, so I have always rather pitied duchesses. At a millionaire's house one is inevitably bored. There is an insufferable glare and glitter of money in everything, unplea-

santly accentuated by an occasional blot of absolute meanness. No, Mrs. Tregonell," pursued the agreeable rattle, "I don't envy duchesses or millionaires' wives: but your existence seems to me utterly enviable, so tranquil and easy a life, in such a perfect house, with the ability to take a plunge into the London vortex whenever you like, or to stay at home if you prefer it, a charming husband, an ideal baby, and above all that sweet equable temperament of yours, which would make life easy under much harder circumstances. Don't you agree with me, now, Miss Bridgeman?"

"I always agree with clever people," answered Jessie, calmly.

Christabel went on with her work, a quiet smile upon her beautiful lips.

Mrs. Torrington was one of those gushing persons to whom there was no higher bliss, after eating and drinking, than the indulgence in that lively monologue which she called conversation, and a happy facility for which rendered her, in her own opinion, an acquisition in any country-house.

"The general run of people are so dull," she

would remark in her confidential moments; "there are so few who can talk, without being disgustingly egotistical. Most people's idea of conversation is autobiography in instalments. I have always been liked for my high spirits and flow of conversation."

High spirits at forty-five are apt to pall, unless accompanied by the rare gift of wit. Mrs. Torrington was not witty, but she had read a good deal of light literature, kept a common-place book, and had gone through life believing herself a Sheridan or a Sidney Smith, in petticoats.

"A woman's wit is like dancing in fetters," she complained sometimes: "there are so many things one must not say!"

Christabel was more than content that her acquaintance should envy her. She wished to be thought happy. She had never for a moment posed as victim or martyr. In good faith, and with steady purpose of well-doing, she had taken upon herself the duties of a wife, and she meant to fulfil them to the uttermost.

"There shall be no shortcoming on my side,"

she said to herself. "If we cannot live peaceably and happily together it shall not be my fault. If Leonard will not let me respect him as a husband, I can still honour him as my boy's father."

In these days of fashionable agnosticism and hysterical devotion—when there is hardly any middle path between life spent in church and church-work and the open avowal of unbelief—something must be said in favour of that old-fashioned sober religious feeling which enabled Christabel Tregonell to walk steadfastly along the difficult way, her mind possessed with the ever-present belief in a Righteous Judge who saw all her acts and knew all her thoughts.

She studied her husband's pleasure in all things—yielding to him upon every point in which principle was not at stake. The house was filled with friends of his choosing—not one among those guests, in spite of their surface pleasantness, being congenial to a mind so simple and unworldly, so straight and thorough, as that of Christabel Tregonell. Without Jessie Bridgeman, Mrs. Tregonell would have been companionless in a house full of

people. The vivacious widow, the slangy young ladies, with a marked taste for billiards and shooting parties, and an undisguised preference for masculine society, thought their hostess behind the age. It was obvious that she was better informed than they, had been more carefully educated, played better, sang better, was more elegant and refined in every thought, and look, and gesture; but, in spite of all these advantages, or perhaps on account of them, she was "slow:" not an easy person to get on with. Her gowns were simply perfect—but she had no *chic*. *Nous autres*, with ever so much less money to spend on our toilettes, look more striking—stand out better from the ruck. An artificial rose here—a rag of old lace—a fan—a vivid ribbon in the mazes of our hair—and the effect catches every eye—while poor Mrs. Tregonell, with her lovely complexion, and a gown that is obviously Parisian, is comparatively nowhere.

This is what the Miss Vandeleurs—old campaigners—told each other as they dressed for dinner, on the second day after their arrival at Mount Royal. Captain Vandeleur—otherwise Poker Van-

deleur, from a supposed natural genius for that intellectual game—was Mr. Tregonell's old friend and travelling companion. They had shared a good deal of sport, and not a little hardship in the Rockies—had fished, and shot, and toboggined in Canada—had played euchre in San Francisco, and monte in Mexico—and, in a word, were bound together by memories and tastes in common. Captain Vandeleur, like Byron's Corsair, had one virtue amidst many shortcomings. He was an affectionate brother, always glad to do a good turn to his sisters—who lived with a shabby old half-pay father, in one of the shabbiest streets in the debatable land between Pimlico and Chelsea—by courtesy, South Belgravia. Captain Vandeleur rarely had it in his power to do much for his sisters himself—a five-pound note at Christmas or a bonnet at Midsummer was perhaps the furthest stretch of his personal benevolence—but he was piously fraternal in his readiness to victimize his dearest friend for the benefit of Dopsy and Mopsy—these being the poetic pet names devised to mitigate the dignity of the baptismal

Adolphine and Margaret. When Jack Vandeleur had a pigeon to pluck, he always contrived that Dopsy and Mopsy should get a few of the feathers. He did not take his friends home to the shabby little ten-roomed house in South Belgravia—such a nest would have too obviously indicated his affinity to the hawk tribe—but he devised some means of bringing Mopsy and Dopsy and his married friends together. A box at the Opera—stalls for the last burlesque—a drag for Epsom or Ascot—or even afternoon tea at Hurlingham—and the thing was done. The Miss Vandeleurs never failed to improve the occasion. They had a genius for making their little wants known, and getting them supplied. The number of their gloves—the only shop in London at which wearable gloves could be bought—how naïvely these favourite themes for girlish converse dropped from their cherry lips. Sunshades, fans, lace, flowers, perfumery—all these luxuries of the toilet were for the most part supplied to Dopsy and Mopsy from this fortuitous source.

Some pigeons lent themselves more kindly to the plucking than others; and the Miss Vandeleurs

had long ago discovered that it was not the wealthiest men who were most lavish. Given a gentleman with a settled estate of fourteen thousand a year, and the probabilities were that he would not rise above a dozen gloves or a couple of bouquets. It was the simple youth who had just come into five or ten thousand, and had nothing but the workhouse ahead of him when that was gone, who spent his money most freely. It is only the man who is steadfastly intent upon ruining himself, who ever quite comes up to the feminine idea of generosity. The spendthrift, during his brief season of fortune, leads a charmed life. For him it is hardly a question whether gloves cost five or ten shillings a pair —whether stephanotis is in or out of season. He offers his tribute to beauty without any base scruples of economy. What does it matter to him whether ruin comes a few months earlier by reason of this lavish liberality, seeing that the ultimate result is inevitable.

With the Miss Vandeleurs Leonard Tregonell ranked as an old friend. They had met him at theatres and races; they had been invited to

little dinners at which he was host. Jack Vandeleur had a special genius for ordering a dinner, and for acting as guide to a man who liked dining in the highways and byways of London; it being an understood thing that Captain Vandeleur's professional position as counsellor exempted him from any share in the reckoning. Under his fraternal protection, Dopsy and Mopsy had dined snugly in all manner of foreign restaurants, and had eaten and drunk their fill at Mr. Tregonell's expense. They were both gourmands, and they were not ashamed of enjoying the pleasures of the table. It seemed to them that the class of men who could not endure to see a woman eat had departed with Byron, and Bulwer, and D'Orsay, and De Musset. A new race has arisen, which likes a "jolly" girl who can appreciate a *recherché* dinner, and knows the difference between good and bad wine.

Mr. Tregonell did not yield himself up a victim to the fascinations of either Dopsy or Mopsy. He had seen too much of that class of beauty during his London experiences, to be caught by the auricomous tangles of one or the flaxen fringe of the

other. He talked of them to their brother as nice girls, with no nonsense about them; he gave them gloves, and dinners, and stalls for "Madame Angot;" but his appreciation took no higher form.

"It would have been a fine thing for one of you if you could have hooked him," said their brother, as he smoked a final pipe, between midnight and morning, in the untidy little drawing-room in South Belgravia, after an evening with Chaumont. "He's a heavy swell in Cornwall, I can tell you. Plenty of money—fine old place. But there's a girl down there he's sweet upon—a cousin. He's very close; but I caught him kissing and crying over her photograph one night in the Rockies—when our rations had run short, and two of our horses gone dead, and our best guide was down with ague, and there was an idea that we'd lost our track, and should never see England again. That's the only time I ever saw Tregonell sentimental. 'I'm not afraid of death,' he said, 'but I should like to live to see home again, for her sake;' and he showed me the photo—a sweet, fresh, young face, smiling at us with a look of home and home-affection, and we poor

beggars not knowing if we should ever see a woman's face again."

"If you knew he was in love with his cousin, what's the use of talking about his marrying us?" asked Mopsy petulantly, speaking of herself and her sister as if they were a firm.

"Oh, there's no knowing," answered Jack, coolly, as he puffed at his meerschaum. "A man may change his mind. Girls with your experience ought to be able to twist a fellow round your little finger. But though you're deuced keen at getting things out of men, you're uncommonly slow at bringing down your bird."

"Look at our surroundings," said Dopsy bitterly. "Could we ever dare to bring a man here; and it is in her own home that a man gets fond of a girl."

"Well, a fellow would have to be very far gone to stand this," Captain Vandeleur admitted, with a shrug of his shoulders, as he glanced round the room, with its blotchy paper, and smoky ceiling, its tawdry chandelier, and dilapidated furniture, flabby faded covers to chairs and sofa, side-table piled with shabby books and accumulated newspapers, the

half-pay father's canes and umbrellas in the corner, his ancient slippers by the fender, his easy-chair, with its morocco cover indented with the greasy imprint of his venerable shoulders, and over all the rank odours of yesterday's dinner and stale tobacco-smoke.

"A man in the last stage of spooniness will stand anything—you remember the opening chapter of 'Wilhelm Meister?'" said Captain Jack, meditatively—"but he'd need be very far gone to stand *this*," he repeated, with conviction.

Six months after this conversation, Mopsy read to Dopsy the announcement of Mr. Tregonell's marriage with the Cornish cousin.

"We shall never see any more of him, you may depend," said Dopsy, with the air of pronouncing an elegy on the ingratitude of man. But she was wrong, for two years later Leonard Tregonell was knocking about town again, in the height of the season, with Poker Vandeleur, and the course of his diversions included a little dinner given to Dopsy and Mopsy at a choice Italian restaurateur's not very far from South Belgravia.

They both made themselves as agreeable as in them lay. He was married. All matrimonial hopes in that quarter were blighted. But marriage need not prevent his giving them dinners and stalls for the play, or being a serviceable friend to their brother.

"Poor Jack's friends are his only reliable income," said Mopsy. "He had need hold them fast."

Mopsy put on her lively Madame Chaumont manner, and tried to amuse the Benedict. Dopsy was graver, and talked to him about his wife.

"She must be very sweet," she said, "from Jack's account of her."

"Why, he's never seen her," exclained Mr. Tregonell, looking puzzled.

"No; but you showed him her photograph once in the Rockies. Jack never forgot it."

Leonard was pleased at this tribute to his good taste.

"She's the loveliest woman I ever saw, though she is my wife," he said; "and I'm not ashamed to say I think so."

"How I should like to know her," sighed Dopsy; 'but I'm afraid she seldom comes to London."

"That makes no difference," answered Leonard, warmed into exceptional good humour by the soft influences of Italian cookery and Italian wines. "Why should not you both come to Mount Royal? I want Jack to come for the shooting. He can bring you, and you'll be able to amuse my wife, while he and I are out on the hills."

"It would be quite too lovely, and we should like it of all things; but do you think Mrs. Tregonell would be able to get on with us?" asked Dopsy, diffidently.

It was not often she and her sister were asked to country houses. They were both fluttered at the idea, and turned their thoughts inward for a mental review of their wardrobes.

"We *could* do it," decided Mopsy, "with a little help from Jack."

Nothing more was said about the visit that night, but a month later, when Leonard had gone back to Mount Royal, a courteous letter from Mrs. Tregonell to Miss Vandeleur confirmed the Squire's invitation, and the two set out for the West of England under their brother's wing, rejoicing at

this stroke of good luck. Christabel had been told that they were nice girls, just the kind of girls to be useful in a country house—girls who had very few opportunities of enjoying life, and to whom any kindness would be a charity—and she had done her husband's bidding without an objection of any kind. But when the two damsels appeared at Mount Royal tightly sheathed in sage-green merino, with limp little capes on their shoulders, and picturesque hats upon picturesque heads of hair, Mrs. Tregonell's heart failed her at the idea of a month spent in such company. Without caring a straw for art, without knowing more of modern poetry than the names of the poets and the covers of their books, Mopsy and Dopsy had been shrewd enough to discover that for young women with narrow means the æsthetic style of dress was by far the safest fashion. Stuff might do duty for silk—a sunflower, if it were only big enough, might make as startling an effect as a blaze of diamonds—a rag of limp tulle or muslin serve instead of costly lace—hair worn after the ideal suffice instead of expensive headgear, and home dressmaking pass current for

originality. Christabel speedily found, however, that these damsels were not exacting in the matter of attention from herself. So long as they were allowed to be with the men they were happy. In the billiard-room, or the tennis-court, in the old Tudor hall, which was Leonard's favourite *tabagie*, in the saddle-room, or the stable-yard, on the hills, or on the sea, wherever the men would suffer their presence, Dopsy and Mopsy were charmed to be. On those rare occasions when the out-of-door party was made up without them they sat about the drawing-room in hopeless, helpless idleness—turning over yesterday's London papers, or stumbling through German waltzes on the iron-framed Kirkman grand, which had been Leonard's birthday gift to his wife. At their worst the Miss Vandeleurs gave Christabel very little trouble, for they felt curiously shy in her society. She was not of their world. They had not one thought or one taste in common. Mrs. Torrington, who insisted upon taking her hostess under her wing, was a much more troublesome person. The Vandeleur girls helped to amuse Leonard, who laughed at their slang and their mannishness, and

who liked the sound of girlish voices in the house—albeit those voices were loud and vulgar. They made themselves particularly agreeable to Jessie Bridgeman, who declared that she took the keenest interest in them—as natural curiosities.

"Why should we pore over moths and zoophytes, and puzzle our brains with long Greek and Latin names," demanded Jessie, "when our own species affords an inexhaustible variety of creatures, all infinitely interesting. These Vandeleur girls are as new to me as if they had dropped from Mars or Saturn."

Life, therefore, to all outward seeming, went very pleasantly at Mount Royal. A perfectly appointed house in which money is spent lavishly can hardly fail to be agreeable to those casual inmates who have nothing to do with its maintenance. To Dopsy and Mopsy Mount Royal was a terrestrial paradise. They had never imagined an existence so entirely blissful. This perfumed atmosphere—this unfailing procession of luxurious meals—no cold mutton to hang on hand—no beggarly mutation from bacon to bloater and bloater to bacon at breakfast-time—no wolf at the door.

"To think that money can make all this difference," exclaimed Mopsy, as she sat with Dopsy on a heather-covered knoll waiting for the shooters to join them at luncheon, while the servants grouped themselves respectfully a little way off with the break and horses. "Won't it be too dreadful to have to go home again?"

"Loathsome!" said Dopsy, whose conversational strength consisted in the liberal use of about half a dozen vigorous epithets.

"I wish there were some rich young men staying here, that one might get a chance of promotion."

"Rich men never marry poor girls," answered Mopsy, dejectedly, "unless the girl is a famous beauty or a favourite actress. You and I are nothing. Heaven only knows what is to become of us when the pater dies. Jack will never be able to give us free quarters. We shall have to go out as shop girls. We're a great deal too ignorant for governesses."

"I shall go on the stage," said Dopsy, with decision. "I may not be handsome—but I can

sing in tune, and my feet and ankles have always been my strong point. All the rest is leather and prunella, as Shakespeare says."

"I shall engage myself to Spiers and Pond," said Mopsy. "It must be a more lively life, and doesn't require either voice or ankles—which I"—rather vindictively—"do not possess. Of course Jack won't like it—but I can't help that."

Thus, in the face of all that is loveliest and most poetical in Nature—the dreamy moorland—the distant sea—the Lion-rock with the afternoon sunshine on it—the blue boundless sky—and one far-away sail, silvered with light, standing out against the low dark line of Lundy Island—debated Mopsy and Dopsy, waiting with keen appetites for the game pasty, and the welcome bottle or two of Moët, which they were to share with the sportsmen.

While these damsels thus beguiled the autumn afternoon, Christabel and Jessie had sallied out alone for one of their old rambles; such a solitary walk as had been their delight in the careless long ago, before ever passionate love, and sorrow, his handmaiden, came to Mount Royal.

Mrs. Torrington and three other guests had left that morning; the Vandeleurs, and Reginald Montagu, a free and easy little war-office clerk, were now the only visitors at Mount Royal, and Mrs. Tregonell was free to lead her own life—so with Jessie and Randie for company, she started at noontide for Tintagel. She could never weary of the walk by the cliffs—or even of the quiet country road with its blossoming hedgerows and boundless outlook. Every step of the way, every tint on field or meadow, every change in sky and sea was familiar to her, but she loved them all.

They had loitered in their ramble by the cliffs, talking a good deal of the past, for Jessie was now the only listener to whom Christabel could freely open her heart, and she loved to talk with her of the days that were gone, and of her first lover. Of their love and of their parting she never spoke—to talk of those things might have seemed treason in the wedded wife—but she loved to talk of the man himself—of his opinions, his ideas, the stories he had told them in their many rambles—his creed, his dreams—speaking of him always as "Mr. Ham-

leigh," and just as she might have spoken of any clever and intimate friend, lost to her, through adverse circumstance, for ever. It is hardly likely, since they talked of him so often when they were alone, that they spoke of him more on this day than usual: but it seemed to them afterwards as if they had done so—and as if their conversation in somewise forecast that which was to happen before yonder sun had dipped behind the wave.

They climbed the castle hill, and seated themselves on a low fragment of wall with their faces seaward. There was a lovely light on the sea, scarcely a breath of wind to curl the edges of the long waves which rolled slowly in and slid over the dark rocks in shining slabs of emerald-tinted water. Here and there deep purple patches showed where the sea-weed grew thickest, and here and there the dark outline of a convocation of shags stood out sharply above the crest of a rock.

"It was on just such a day that we first brought Mr. Hamleigh to this place," said Christabel.

"Yes, our Cornish autumns are almost always lovely, and this year the weather is particularly

mild," answered Jessie, in her matter-of-fact way. She always put on this air when she saw Christabel drifting into dangerous feeling. "I shouldn't wonder if we were to have a second crop of strawberries this year."

"Do you remember how we talked of Tristan and Iseult—poor Iseult?"

"Poor Marc, I think."

"Marc? One can't pity *him*. He was an ingrate, and a coward."

"He was a man and a husband," retorted Jessie; "and he seems to have been badly treated all round."

"Whither does he wander now?" said Christabel, softly repeating lines learnt long ago.

> "Haply in his dreams the wind
> Wafts him here and lets him find
> The lovely orphan child again,
> In her castle by the coast;
> The youngest fairest chatelaine,
> That this realm of France can boast,
> Our snowdrop by the Atlantic sea,
> Iseult of Brittany."

"Poor Iseult of the White Hand," said a voice

at Christabel's shoulder, "after all was not her lot the saddest—had not she the best claim to our pity?"

Christabel started, turned, and she and Angus Hamleigh looked in each other's faces in the clear bright light. It was over four years since they had parted, tenderly, fondly, as plighted husband and wife, locked in each other's arms, promising each other speedy reunion, ineffably happy in their assurance of a future to be spent together: and now they met with pale cheeks, and lips dressed in a society smile—eyes—to which tears would have been a glad relief—assuming a careless astonishment.

"You here, Mr. Hamleigh!" cried Jessie, seeing Christabel's lips quiver dumbly, as if in the vain attempt at words, and rushing to the rescue. "We were told you were in Russia."

"I have been in Russia. I spent last winter at Petersburg—the only place where caviare and Adelina Patti are to be enjoyed in perfection—and I spent a good deal of this summer that is just gone in the Caucasus."

"How nice!" exclaimed Jessie, as if he had been

talking of Buxton or Malvern. "And did you really enjoy it?"

"Immensely. All I ever saw in Switzerland is as nothing compared with the gloomy grandeur of that mighty semicircle of mountain peaks, of which Elburz, the shining mountain, the throne of Ormuzd, occupies the centre."

"And how do you happen to be here—on this insignificant mound?" asked Jessie.

"Tintagel's surge-beat hill can never seem insignificant to me. National poetry has peopled it—while the Caucasus is only a desert."

"Are you touring?"

"No, I am staying with the Vicar of Trevena. He is an old friend of my father's: they were college chums; and Mr. Carlyon is always kind to me."

Mr. Carlyon was a new vicar, who had come to Trevena within the last two years.

"Shall you stay long?" asked Christabel, in tones which had a curiously flat sound, as of a voice produced by mechanism.

"I think not. It is a delicious place to stay at, but——"

"A little of it goes a long way," said Jessie.

"You have not quite anticipated my sentiments, Miss Bridgeman. I was going to say that unfortunately for me I have engagements in London which will prevent my staying here much longer."

"You are not looking over robust," said Jessie, touched with pity by the sad forecast which she saw in his faded eyes, his hollow cheeks, faintly tinged with hectic bloom. "I'm afraid the Caucasus was rather too severe a training for you."

"A little harder than the ordeal to which you submitted my locomotive powers some years ago," answered Angus, smiling; "but how can a man spend the strength of his manhood better than in beholding the wonders of creation? It is the best preparation for those still grander scenes which one faintly hopes to see by-and-by among the stars. According to the Platonic theory a man must train himself for immortality. He who goes straight from earthly feasts and junkettings will get a bad time in the under world, or may have to work out his purgation in some debased brute form."

"Poor fellow," thought Jessie, with a sigh, "I suppose that kind of feeling is his nearest approach to religion."

Christabel sat very still, looking steadily towards Lundy, as if the only desire in her mind were to identify yonder vague streak of purplish brown or brownish purple with the level strip of land chiefly given over to rabbits. Yet her heart was aching and throbbing passionately all the while; and the face at which she dared scarce look was vividly before her mental sight—sorely altered from the day she had last seen it smile upon her in love and confidence. But mixed with the heartache there was joy. To see him again, to hear his voice again—what could that be but happiness?

She knew that there was delight in being with him, and she told herself that she had no right to linger. She rose with an automatic air. "Come, Jessie," she said: and then she turned with an effort to the man whose love she had renounced, whose heart she had broken.

"Good-by!" she said, holding out her hand, and looking at him with calm, grave eyes. "I am

very glad to have seen you again. I hope you always think of me as your friend?"

"Yes, Mrs. Tregonell, I can afford now to think of you as a friend," he answered, gravely, gently, holding her hand with a lingering grasp, and looking solemnly into the sweet pale face.

He shook hands cordially with Jessie Bridgeman, and they left him standing amidst the low grass-hidden graves of the unknown dead—a lonely figure looking seaward.

"Oh! Jessie, do you remember the day we first came here with him?" cried Christabel, as they went slowly down the steep winding path. The exclamation sounded almost like a cry of pain.

"Am I ever likely to forget it—or anything connected with him? You have given me no chance of that," retorted Miss Bridgeman, sharply.

"How bitterly you say that!"

"Can I help being bitter when I see you nursing morbid feelings? Am I to encourage you to dwell upon dangerous thoughts?"

"They are not dangerous. I have taught myself to think of Angus as a friend—and a friend only.

If I could see him now and then—even as briefly as we saw him to-day—I think it would make me quite happy."

"You don't know what you are talking about!" said Jessie, angrily. "Certainly, you are not much like other women. You are a piece of icy propriety—your love is a kind of milk-and-watery sentiment, which would never lead you very far astray. I can fancy you behaving somewhat in the style of Werther's Charlotte—who is, to my mind, one of the most detestable women in fiction. Yes! Goethe has created two women who are the opposite poles of feeling—Gretchen and Lottie—and I would stake my faith that Gretchen the fallen has a higher place in heaven than Lottie the impeccable. I hate such dull purity, which is always lined with selfishness. The lover may slay himself in his anguish—but she—yes—Thackeray has said it—she goes on cutting bread and butter!"

Jessie gave a little hysterical laugh, which she accentuated by a leap from the narrow path where she had been walking to a boulder four or five feet below.

"How madly you talk, Jessie. You remind me of Scott's Fenella—and I believe you are almost as wild a creature," said Christabel.

"Yes! I suspect there is a spice of gipsy blood in my veins. I am subject to these occasional outbreaks—these revolts against Philistinism. Life is so steeped in respectability—the dull level morality which prompts every man to do what his neighbour thinks he ought to do, rather than to be set in motion by the fire that burns within him. This dread of one's neighbour—this slavish respect for public opinion—reduces life to mere mechanism —society to a stage play."

CHAPTER X.

"BUT IT SUFFICETH, THAT THE DAY WILL END."

CHRISTABEL said no word to her husband about that unexpected meeting with Angus Hamleigh. She knew that the name was obnoxious to Leonard, and she shrank from a statement which might provoke unpleasant speech on his part. Mr. Hamleigh would doubtless have left Trevena in a few days—there was no likelihood of any further meeting.

The next day was a blank day for the Miss Vandeleurs, who found themselves reduced to the joyless society of their own sex.

The harriers met at Trevena at ten o'clock, and thither, after an early breakfast, rode Mr. Tregonell, Captain Vandeleur, and three or four other kindred spirits. The morning was showery and blustery, and it was in vain that Dopsy and Mopsy hinted their desire to be driven to the meet. They were not horsewomen—from no want of pluck or ardour

for the chase—but simply from the lack of that material part of the business, horses. Many and many a weary summer day had they paced the path beside Rotten Row, wistfully regarding the riders, and thinking what a seat and what hands they would have had, if Providence had only given them a mount. The people who do not ride are the keenest critics of horsemanship.

Compelled to find their amusements within doors, Dopsy and Mopsy sat in the morning-room for half an hour, as a sacrifice to good manners, paid a duty visit to the nurseries to admire Christabel's baby-boy, and then straggled off to the billiard-room, to play each other, and improve their skill at that delightfully masculine game. Then came luncheon —at which meal, the gentlemen being all away, and the party reduced to four, the baby-boy was allowed to sit on his mother's lap, and make occasional raids upon the table furniture, while the Miss Vandeleurs made believe to worship him. He was a lovely boy, with big blue eyes, wide with wonder at a world which was still full of delight and novelty.

After luncheon, Mopsy and Dopsy retired to their chamber, to concoct, by an ingenious process of re-organization of the same atoms, a new costume for the evening; and as they sat at their work, twisting and undoing bows and lace, and straightening the leaves of artificial flowers, they again discoursed somewhat dejectedly of their return to South Belgravia, which could hardly be staved off much longer.

"We have had a quite too delicious time," sighed Mopsy, adjusting the stalk of a sunflower; "but it's rather a pity that all the men staying here have been detrimentals—not one worth catching."

"What does it matter!" ejaculated Dopsy. "If there had been one worth catching, he wouldn't have consented to be caught. He would have behaved like that big jack Mr. Tregonell was trying for the other morning: eaten up all our bait and gone and sulked among the weeds."

"Well, I'd have had a try for him, anyhow," said Mopsy, defiantly, leaning her elbow on the dressing-table, and contemplating herself deliberately in the glass. "Oh, Dop, how old I'm getting. I

almost hate the daylight: it makes one look so hideous."

Yet neither Dopsy nor Mopsy thought herself hideous at afternoon tea-time, when, with complexions improved by the powder puff, eyebrows piquantly accentuated with Indian ink, and loose flowing tea-gowns of old gold sateen, and older black silk, they descended to the library, eager to do execution even on detrimentals. The men's voices sounded loud in the hall, as the two girls came downstairs.

"Hope you have had a good time?" cried Mopsy, in cheerful soprano tones.

"Splendid. I'm afraid Tregonell has lamed a couple of his horses," said Captain Vandeleur.

"And I've a shrewd suspicion that you've lamed a third," interjected Leonard in his strident tones. "You galloped Betsy Baker at a murderous rate."

"Nothing like taking them fast down hill," retorted Jack. "B. B. is as sound as a roach—and quite as ugly."

"Never saw such break-neck work in my life," said Mr. Montagu, a small dandified person who

was always called "little Monty." "I'd rather ride a horse with the Quorn for a week than in this country for a day."

"Our country is as God made it," answered Leonard.

"I think Satan must have split it about a bit afterwards," said Mr. Montagu.

"Well, Mop," asked Leonard, "how did you and Dop get rid of your day without us?"

"Oh, we were very happy. It was quite a relief to have a nice homey day with dear Mrs. Tregonell," answered Mopsy, nothing offended by the free and easy curtailment of her pet name. Leonard was her benefactor, and a privileged person.

"I've got some glorious news for you two girls," said Mr. Tregonell, as they all swarmed into the library, where Christabel was sitting in the widow's old place, while Jessie Bridgeman filled her accustomed position before the tea-table, the red glow of a liberal wood fire contending with the pale light of one low moderator lamp, under a dark velvet shade.

"What is it? Please, please tell."

"I give it you in ten—a thousand—a million!"

cried Leonard, flinging himself into the chair next his wife, and with his eyes upon her face. "You'll never guess. I have found you an eligible bachelor—a swell of the first water. He's a gentleman whom a good many girls have tried for in their time, I've no doubt. Handsome, accomplished, plenty of coin. He has had what the French call a stormy youth, I believe; but that doesn't matter. He's getting on in years, and no doubt he's ready to sober down, and take to domesticity. I've asked him here for a fortnight to shoot woodcock, and to offer his own unconscious breast as a mark for the arrows of Cupid; and I shall have a very poor opinion of you two girls if you can't bring him to your feet in half the time."

"At any rate I'll try my hand at it," said Mopsy. "Not that I care a straw for the gentleman, but just to show you what I can do," she added, by way of maintaining her maidenly dignity.

"Of course you'll go in for the conquest as high art, without any *arrière pensée*," said Jack Vandeleur. "There never were such audacious flirts as my sisters; but there's no malice in them."

"You haven't told us your friend's name," said Dopsy.

"Mr. Hamleigh," answered Leonard, with his eyes still on his wife's face.

Christabel gave a little start, and looked at him in undisguised astonishment.

"Surely you have not asked him—here?" she exclaimed.

"Why not? He was out with us to-day. He is a jolly fellow; rides uncommonly straight, though he doesn't look as if there were much life in him. He tailed off early in the afternoon; but while he did go, he went dooced well. He rode a dooced fine horse, too."

"I thought you were prejudiced against him," said Christabel, very slowly.

"Why, so I was, till I saw him," answered Leonard, with the friendliest air. "I fancied he was one of your sickly, sentimental twaddlers, with long hair, and a taste for poetry; but I find he is a fine, manly fellow, with no nonsense about him. So I asked him here, and insisted upon his saying yes. He didn't seem to want to come, which is

odd, for he made himself very much at home here in my mother's time, I've heard. However, he gave in when I pressed him; and he'll be here by dinner-time to-morrow."

"By dinner-time," thought Mopsy, delighted. "Then he'll see us first by candlelight, and first impressions may do so much."

"Isn't it almost like a fairy tale?" said Dopsy, as they were dressing for dinner, with a vague recollection of having cultivated her imagination in childhood. She had never done so since that juvenile age. "Just as we were sighing for the prince he comes."

"True," said Mopsy; "and he will go, just as all the other fairy princes have gone, leaving us alone upon the dreary high road, and riding off to the fairy princesses who have good homes, and good clothes, and plenty of money."

The high-art toilets were postponed for the following evening, so that the panoply of woman's war might be fresh; and on that evening Mopsy and Dopsy, their long limbs sheathed in sea-green velveteen, Toby-frills round their necks, and sun-

flowers on their shoulders, were gracefully grouped near the fireplace in the pink and white panelled drawing-room, waiting for Mr. Hamleigh's arrival.

"I wonder why all the girls make themselves walking advertisements of the Sun Fire Office," speculated Mr. Montagu, taking a prosaic view of the Vandeleur sunflowers, as he sat by Miss Bridgeman's work-basket.

"Don't you know that sunflowers are so beautifully Greek?" asked Jessie. "They have been the only flower in fashion since Alma Tadema took to painting them—fountains, and marble balustrades, and Italian skies, and beautiful women, and sunflowers."

"Yes; but we get only the sunflowers."

"Mr. Hamleigh!" said the butler at the open door, and Angus came in, and went straight to Christabel, who was sitting opposite the group of sea-green Vandeleurs, slowly fanning herself with a big black fan.

Nothing could be calmer than their meeting. This time there was no surprise, no sudden shock, no dear familiar scene, no solemn grandeur of

Nature to make all effort at simulation unnatural. The atmosphere to-night was as conventional as the men's swallowed-tailed coats and white ties. Yet in Angus Hamleigh's mind there was the picture of his first arrival at Mount Royal—the firelit room, Christabel's girlish figure kneeling on the hearth. The figure was a shade more matronly now, the carriage and manner were more dignified; but the face had lost none of its beauty, or of its divine candour.

"I am very glad my husband persuaded you to alter your plans, and to stay a little longer in the West," she said, with an unfaltering voice; and then, seeing Mopsy and Dopsy looking at Mr. Hamleigh with admiring expectant eyes, she added, "Let me introduce you to these young ladies who are staying with us—Mr. Hamleigh, Miss Vandeleur, Miss Margaret Vandeleur."

Dopsy and Mopsy smiled their sweetest smiles, and gave just the most æsthetic inclination of each towzled head.

"I suppose you have not long come from London?" murmured Dopsy, determined not to lose a moment.

"Have you seen all the new things at the theatres? I hope you are an Irvingite!"

"I regret to say that my religious opinions have not yet taken that bent. It is a spiritual height which I feel myself too weak to climb. I have never been able to believe in the unknown tongues."

"Ah, now you are going to criticize his pronunciation, instead of admiring his genius," said Dopsy, who had never heard of Edward Irving and the Latter Day Saints.

"If you mean Henry Irving the tragedian, I admire him immensely," said Mr. Hamleigh.

"Then we are sure to get on. I felt that you must be *simpatica*," replied Dopsy, not particular as to a gender in a language which she only knew by sight, as Bannister knew Greek.

Dinner was announced at this moment, and Mrs. Tregonell won Dopsy's gratitude by asking Mr. Hamleigh to take her into dinner. Mr. Montagu gave his arm to Miss Bridgeman, Leonard took Mopsy, and Christabel followed with Major Bree, who felt for her keenly, wondering how she managed to bear herself so bravely, reproaching the dead

woman in his mind for having parted two faithful hearts.

He was shocked by the change in Angus, obvious even to-night, albeit the soft lamplight and evening dress were flattering to his appearance; but he said no word of that change to Christabel.

"I have been having a romp with my godson," he said, when they were seated, knowing that this was the one topic likely to cheer and interest his hostess.

"I am so glad," she answered, lighting up at once, and unconscious that Angus was trying to see her face under the low lamplight, which made it necessary to bend one's head a little to see one's opposite neighbour. "And do you think he is grown? It is nearly ten days since you saw him, and he grows so fast."

"He is a young Hercules. If there were any snakes in Cornwall he would be capable of strangling a brace of them. I suppose Leonard is tremendously proud of him."

"Yes," she answered with a faint sigh. "I think Leonard is *proud* of him."

"But not quite so fond of him as you are," replied Major Bree, interpreting her emphasis. "That is only natural. Infantolatry is a feminine attribute. Wait till the boy is old enough to go out fishin' and shootin'—" the Major was too much a gentleman to pronounce a final g—"and then see if his father don't dote upon him."

"I dare say he will be very fond of him then. But I shall be miserable every hour he is out."

"Of course. Women ought to have only girls for children. There should be a race of man-mothers to rear the boys. I wonder Plato didn't suggest that in his Republic."

Mr. Hamleigh, with his head gently bent over his soup-plate, had contrived to watch Christabel's face while politely replying to a good deal of gush on the part of the fair Dopsy. He saw that expressive face light up with smiles, and then grow earnest. She was full of interest and animation, and her candid look showed that the conversation was one which all the world might have heard.

"She has forgotten me. She is happy in her married life," he said to himself, and then he looked

to the other end of the table where Leonard sat, burly, florid, black-haired, mutton-chop whiskered, the very essence of Philistinism—"happy—with him."

"And I am sure you must adore Ellen Terry," said Dopsy, whose society-conversation was not a many-stringed instrument.

"Who could live and not worship her?" ejaculated Mr. Hamleigh.

"Irving as Shylock!" sighed Dopsy.

"Miss Terry as Portia," retorted Angus.

"Unutterably sweet, was she not?"

"Her movements were like a sonata by Beethoven—her gowns were the essence of all that Rubens and Vandyck ever painted."

"I knew you would agree with me," exclaimed Dopsy. "And do you think her pretty?"

"Pretty is not the word. She is simply divine. Greuze might have painted her—there is no living painter whose palette holds the tint of those blue eyes."

Dopsy began to giggle softly to herself, and to flutter her fan with maiden modesty.

"I hardly like to mention it after what you have said," she murmured, "but——"

"Pray be explicit."

"I have been told that I am rather"—another faint giggle and another flutter—"like Miss Terry."

"I never met a fair-haired girl yet who had not been told as much," answered Mr. Hamleigh coolly.

Dopsy turned crimson, and felt that this particular arrow had missed the gold. Mr. Hamleigh was not quite so easy to get on with as her hopeful fancy had painted him.

After dinner there was some music, in which art neither of the Miss Vandeleurs excelled. Indeed, their time had been too closely absorbed by the ever pressing necessity for cutting and contriving to allow of the study of art and literature. They knew the names of writers, and the outsides of books, and they adored the opera, and enjoyed a ballad concert, if the singers were popular, and the audience well dressed; and this was the limit of their artistic proclivities. They sat stifling their yawns, and longing for an adjournment to the billard room—whither Jack Vandeleur

and Mr. Montagu had departed—while Christabel played a capriccio by Mendelssohn. Mr. Hamleigh sat by the piano listening to every note. Leonard and Major Bree lounged by the fireplace, Jessie Bridgeman sitting near them, absorbed in her crewel work.

It was what Mopsy and Dopsy called a very "slow" evening, despite the new interest afforded by Mr. Hamleigh's presence. He was very handsome, very elegant, with an inexpressible something in his style and air which Mopsy thought poetical. But it was weary work to sit and gaze at him as if he were a statue, and that long capriccio, with a little Beethoven to follow, and a good deal of Mozart after that, occupied the best part of the evening. To the ears of Mop and Dop it was all tweedledum and tweedledee. They would have been refreshed by one of those lively melodies in which Miss Farren so excels; they would have welcomed a familiar strain from Chilperic or Madame Angot. Yet they gushed and said, "too delicious—quite too utterly lovely," when Mrs. Tregonell rose from the piano.

"I only hope I have not wearied everybody," she said.

Leonard and Major Bree had been talking local politics all the time, and both expressed themselves much gratified by the music. Mr. Hamleigh murmured his thanks.

Christabel went to her room wondering that the evening had passed so calmly—that her heart—though it had ached at the change in Angus Hamleigh's looks, had been in no wise tumultuously stirred by his presence. There had been a peaceful feeling in her mind rather than agitation. She had been soothed and made happy by his society. If love still lingered in her breast it was love purified of every earthly thought and hope. She told herself sorrowfully that for him the sand ran low in the glass of earthly time, and it was sweet to have him near her for a little while towards the end; to be able to talk to him of serious things—to inspire hope in a soul whose natural bent was despondency. It would be sadly, unutterably sweet to talk to him of that spiritual world whose unearthly light already shone in the

too brilliant eye, and coloured the hollow cheek. She had found Mr. Hamleigh despondent and sceptical, but never indifferent to religion. He was not one of that eminently practical school which, in the words of Matthew Arnold, thinks it more important to learn how buttons and *papier-mâché* are made than to search the depths of conscience, or fathom the mysteries of a Divine Providence.

Christabel's first sentiment when Leonard announced Mr. Hamleigh's intended visit had been horror. How could they two who had loved so deeply, parted so sadly, live together under the same roof as if they were every day friends? The thing seemed fraught with danger, impossible for peace. But when she remembered that calm, almost solemn look with which he had shaken hands with her among the graves at Tintagel, it seemed to her that friendship—calmest, purest, most unselfish attachment—was still possible between them. She thought so even more hopefully on the morning after Mr. Hamleigh's arrival, when he took her boy in his arms, and pressed his lips lovingly upon the bright baby brow.

"You are fond of children," exclaimed Mopsy, prepared to gush.

"Very fond of some children," he answered gravely. "I shall be very fond of this boy, if he will let me."

"Leo is such a darling—and he takes to you already," said Mopsy, seeing that the child graciously accepted Mr. Hamleigh's attentions, and even murmured an approving "gur"—followed by a simple one-part melody of gurgling noises—but whether in approval of the gentlemen himself or of his watch-chain, about which the pink flexible fingers had wound themselves, was an open question.

This was in the hall after breakfast, on a bright sunshiny morning — doors and windows open, and the gardens outside all abloom with chrysanthemums and scarlet geraniums; the gentlemen of the party standing about with their guns ready to start. Mopsy and Dopsy were dressed in home-made gowns of dark brown serge which simulated the masculine simplicity of tailor-made garments. They wore coquettish little toques of the same dark brown stuff, also home-made—and

surely, if a virtuous man contending with calamity is a spectacle meet for the gods to admire a needy young woman making her own raiment is at least worthy of human approval.

"You are coming with us, aren't you, Hamleigh," asked Leonard, seeing Angus still occupied with the child.

"No, thanks; I don't feel in good form for woodcock shooting. My cough was rather troublesome last night."

Mopsy and Dopsy looked at each other despairingly. Here was a golden opportunity lost. If it were only possible to sprain an ankle on the instant.

Jack Vandeleur was a good brother—so long as fraternal kindness did not cost money—and he saw that look of blank despair in poor Dopsy's eyes and lips.

"I think Mr. Hamleigh is wise," he said. "This bright morning will end in broken weather. Hadn't you two girls better stay at home? The rain will spoil your gowns."

"Our gowns won't hurt," said Mopsy brighten-

ing. "But do you really think there will be rain? We had so set our hearts on going with you; but it is rather miserable to be out on those hills in a blinding rain. One might walk over the edge of a cliff."

"Keep on the safe side and stay at home," said Leonard, with that air of rough good nature which is such an excellent excuse for bad manners. "Come Ponto, come Juno, hi Delia," this to the lovely lemon and white spaniels, fawning upon him with mute affection.

"I think we may as well give it up," said Dopsy, "we shall be a nuisance to the shooters if it rains."

So they stayed, and beguiled Mr. Hamleigh to the billiard room, where they both played against him, and were beaten—after which Mopsy entreated him to give her a lesson in the art, declaring that he played divinely—in such a quite style—so very superior to Jack's or Mr. Tregonell's, though both those gentlemen were good players. Angus consented, kindly enough, and gave both ladies the most careful instruction in the art of making

pockets and cannons; but he was wondering all the while how Christabel was spending her morning, and thinking how sweet it would have been to have strolled with her across the hills to the quiet little church in the dingle where he had once dreamed they two might be married.

"I was a fool to submit to delay," he thought, remembering all the pain and madness of the past. "If I had insisted on being married here—and at once—how happy—oh God!—how happy we might have been. Well, it matters little, now that the road is so near the end. I suppose the dismal close would have come just as soon if my way of life had been strewed with flowers."

It was luncheon-time before the Miss Vandeleurs consented to release him. Once having got him in their clutch he was as firmly held as if he had been caught by an octopus. Christabel wondered a little that Angus Hamleigh should find amusement for his morning in the billiard room, and in such society.

"Perhaps, after all, the Miss Vandeleurs are the kind of girls whom all gentlemen admire," she

said to Jessie. "I know I thought it odd that Leonard should admire them; but you see Mr. Hamleigh is equally pleased with them."

"Mr. Hamleigh is nothing of the kind," answered Jessie in her usual decided way. "But Dop is setting her cap at him in a positively disgraceful manner—even for Dop."

"Pray don't call her by that horrid name."

"Why not; it is what her brother and sister call her, and it expresses her so exactly."

Mr. Hamleigh and the two damsels now appeared, summoned by the gong, and they all went into the dining-room. It was quite a merry luncheon party. Care seemed to have no part in that cheery circle. Angus had made up his mind to be happy, and Christabel was as much at ease with him as she had been in those innocent, unconscious days when he first came to Mount Royal. Dopsy was in high spirits, thinking that she was fast advancing towards victory. Mr. Hamleigh had been so kind, so attentive, had done exactly what she had asked him to do, and how could she doubt that he had consulted his own pleasure in so doing.

Poor Dopsy was accustomed to be treated with scant ceremony by her brother's acquaintance, and it did not enter into her mind that a man might be bored by her society, and not betray his weariness.

After luncheon Jessie, who was always energetic, suggested a walk.

The threatened bad weather had not come: it was a greyish afternoon, sunless but mild.

"If we walk towards St. Nectan's Kieve, we may meet the shooters," said Christabel. "That is a great place for woodcock."

"That will be delicious!" exclaimed Dopsy. "I worship St. Nectan's Kieve. Such a lovely ferny, rocky, wild, watery spot." And away she and her sister skipped, to put on the brown toques, and to refresh themselves with a powder puff.

They started for their ramble with Randie, and a favourite Clumber spaniel, degraded from his proud position as a sporting dog, to the ignoble luxury of a house pet, on account of an incorrigible desultoriness in his conduct with birds.

These affectionate creatures frisked round Christabel, while Miss Vandeleur and her sister seemed

almost as friskily to surround Mr. Hamleigh with their South Belgravian blandishments.

"You look as if you were not very strong," hazarded Dopsy, sympathetically. "Are you not afraid of a long walk?"

"Not at all; I never feel better than when walking on these hills," answered Angus. "It is almost my native air, you see. I came here to get a stock of rude health before I go to winter in the South.

"And you are really going to be abroad all the winter?" sighed Dopsy, as if she would have said, "How shall I bear my life in your absence."

"Yes, it is five years since I spent a winter in England. I hold my life on that condition. I am never to know the luxury of a London fog, or see a Drury Lane pantomime, or skate upon the Serpentine. A case of real distress, is it not?"

"Very sad—for your friends," said Dopsy; "but I can quite imagine that you love the sunny South. How I long to see the Mediterranean—the mountains—the pine-trees—the border-land of Italy."

"No doubt you will go there some day—and be

disappointed. People generally are when they indulge in day-dreams about a place."

"My dreams will always be dreams," answered Dopsy, with a profound sigh: "we are not rich enough to travel."

Christabel walked on in front with Jessie and the dogs. Mr. Hamleigh was longing to be by her side—to talk as they had talked of old—of a thousand things which could be safely discussed without any personal feeling. They had so many sympathies, so many ideas in common. All the world of sense and sentiment was theirs wherein to range at will. But Dopsy and Mopsy stuck to him like burs; plying him with idle questions, and stereotyped remarks, looking at him with languishing eyes.

He was too much a gentleman, had too much good feeling to be rude to them—but he was bored excessively.

They went by the cliffs—a wild grand walk. The wide Atlantic spread its dull leaden-coloured waves before them under the grey sky—touched with none of those translucent azures and carmines

which so often beautify that western sea. They crossed a bit of hillocky common, and then went down to look at a slate quarry under the cliff—a scene of uncanny grandeur—grey and wild and desolate.

Dopsy and Mopsy gushed and laughed and declared it was just the scene for a murder, or a duel, or something dreadful and dramatic. The dogs ran into all manner of perilous places, and had to be called away from the verge of instant death.

"Are you fond of aristocratic society, Miss Vandeleur?" asked Angus.

Mopsy pleaded guilty to a prejudice in favour of the Upper Ten.

"Then allow me to tell you that you were never in the company of so many duchesses and countesses in your life as you are at this moment."

Mopsy looked mystified, until Miss Bridgeman explained that these were the names given to slates of particular sizes, great stacks of which stood on either side of them ready for shipment.

"How absurd," exclaimed Mopsy.

"Everything must have a name, even the slate that roofs your scullery."

From the quarry they strolled across the fields to the high road, and the gate of the farm which contains within its boundary the wonderful waterfall called St. Nectan's Kieve.

They met the sportsmen coming out of the hollow with well-filled game-bags.

Leonard was in high spirits.

"So you've all come to meet us," he said, looking at his wife, and from his wife to Angus Hamleigh, with a keen, quick glance, too swift to be remarkable. "Uncommonly good of you. We are going to have a grand year for woodcock, I believe—like the season of 1855, when a farmer at St. Buryan shot fifty-four in one week."

"Poor dear little birds!" sighed Mopsy; "I feel so sorry for them."

"But that doesn't prevent your eating them, with breadcrumbs and gravy," said Leonard, laughing.

"When they are once roasted, it can make no difference who eats them," replied Mopsy; "but I am intensely sorry for them all the same."

They all went home together, a cheery pro-

cession, with the dogs at their heels. Mr. Hamleigh's efforts to escape from the two damsels who had marked him for their own, were futile : nothing less than sheer brutality would have set him free. They trudged along gaily, one on each side of him ; they flattered him, they made much of him—a man must have been stony-hearted to remain untouched by such attentions. Angus was marble, but he could not be uncivil. It was his nature to be gentle to women. Mop and Dop were the kind of girls he most detested—indeed, it seemed to him that no other form of girlhood could be so detestable. They had all the pertness of Bohemia without any of its wit—they had all the audacity of the *demi-monde,* with far inferior attractions. Everything about them was spurious and second-hand—every air and look and tone was put on, like a ribbon or a flower, to attract attention. And could it be that one of these meretricious creatures was angling for him—for him, the Lauzun, the d'Eckmühl, the Prince de Belgioso, of his day—the born dandy, with whom fastidiousness was a sixth sense? Intolerable as the idea of being so pursued was to

him, Angus Hamleigh could not bring himself to be rude to a woman.

It happened, therefore, that from the beginning to the end of that long ramble, he was never in Mrs. Tregonell's society. She and Jessie walked steadily ahead with their dogs, while the sportsmen tramped slowly behind Mr. Hamleigh and the two girls.

"Our friend seems to be very much taken by your sisters," said Leonard to Captain Vandeleur.

"My sisters are deuced taking girls," answered Jack, puffing at his seventeenth cigarette; "though I suppose it isn't my business to say so. There's nothing of the professional beauty about either of 'em."

"Distinctly not!" said Leonard.

"But they've plenty of *chic*—plenty of go—*savoir faire*—and all that kind of thing, don't you know. They're the most companionable girls I ever met with!"

"They're uncommonly jolly little buffers!" said Leonard, kindly, meaning it for the highest praise.

"They've no fool's flesh about them," said Jack; "and they can make a fiver go further than any one

I know. A man might do worse than marry one of them."

"Hardly!" thought Leonard, "unless he married both."

"It would be a fine thing for Dop if Mr. Hamleigh were to come to the scratch," mused Jack.

"I wonder what was Leonard's motive in asking Mr. Hamleigh to stay at Mount Royal?" said Christabel, suddenly, after she and Jessie had been talking of indifferent subjects.

"I hope he had not any motive, but that the invitation was the impulse of the moment, without rhyme or reason," answered Miss Bridgeman.

"Why?"

"Because if he had a motive, I don't think it could be a good one."

"Might he not think it just possible that he was finding a husband for one of his friend's sisters?" speculated Christabel.

"Nonsense, my dear! Leonard is not quite a fool. If he had a motive, it was something very different from any concern for the interests of Dop

or Mop—I will call them Dop and Mop: they are so like it."

In spite of Mopsy and Dopsy, there were hours in which Angus Hamleigh was able to enjoy the society which had once been so sweet to him, almost as freely as in the happy days that were gone. Brazen as the two damsels were the feeling of self-respect was not altogether extinct in their natures. Their minds were like grass-plots which had been trodden into mere clay, but where a lingering green blade here and there shows that the soil had once been verdant. Before Mr. Hamleigh came to Mount Royal, it had been their habit to spend their evenings in the billiard-room with the gentlemen, albeit Mrs. Tregonell very rarely left the drawing-room after dinner, preferring the perfect tranquillity of that almost deserted apartment, the inexhaustible delight of her piano or her books, with Jessie for her sole companion—nay, sometimes, quite alone, while Jessie joined the revellers at pool or shell-out. Dopsy and Mopsy could not altogether alter their habits because Mr. Hamleigh spent his evenings in the drawing-room: the

motive for such a change would have been too obvious. The boldest huntress would scarce thus openly pursue her prey. So the Miss Vandeleurs went regretfully with their brother and his host, and marked, or played an occasional four-game, and made themselves conversationally agreeable all the evening; while Angus Hamleigh sat by the piano, and gave himself up to dreamy thought, soothed by the music of the great composers, played with a level perfection which only years of careful study can achieve. Jessie Bridgeman never left the drawing-room now of an evening. Faithful and devoted to her duty of companion and friend, she seemed almost Christabel's second self. There was no restraint, no embarrassment, caused by her presence. What she had been to these two in their day of joy, she was to them in their day of sorrow, wholly and completely one of themselves. She was no stony guardian of the proprieties; no bar between their souls and dangerous memories or allusions. She was their friend, reading and understanding the minds of both.

It has been finely said by Matthew Arnold that

there are times when a man feels, in this life, the sense of immortality; and that feeling must surely be strongest with him who knows that his race is nearly run—who feels the rosy light of life's sunset warm upon his face—who knows himself near the lifting of the veil—the awful, fateful experiment called death. Angus Hamleigh knew that for him the end was not far off—it might be less than a year—more than a year—but he felt very sure that this time there would be no reprieve. Not again would the physician's sentence be reversed—the physician's theories gainsayed by facts. For the last four years he had lived as a man lives who has ceased to value his life. He had exposed himself to the hardships of mountain climbing—he had sat late in gaming saloons—not gambling himself, but interested in a cynical way, as Balzac might have been, in the hopes and fears of others—seeking amusement wherever and however it was to be found. At his worst he had never been a man utterly without religion; not a man who could willingly forego the hope in a future life—but that hope, until of late, had been clouded and dim, Rabelais'

great perhaps, rather than the Christian's assured belief. As the cold shade of death drew nearer, the horizon cleared, and he was able to rest his hopes in a fair future beyond the grave—an existence in which a man's happiness should not be dependent on the condition of his lungs, nor his career marred by an hereditary taint in the blood—an existence in which spirit should be divorced from clay, yet not become so entirely abstract as to be incapable of such pleasures as are sweetest and purest among the joys of humanity—a life in which friendship and love might still be known in fullest measure. And now, with the knowledge that for him there remained but a brief remnant of this earthly existence, that were the circumstances of his life ever so full of joy, that life itself could not be lengthened, it was very sweet to him to spend a few quiet hours with her who, for the last five years, had been the pole-star of his thoughts. For him there could be no *arrière pensée*—no tending towards forbidden hopes, forbidden dreams. Death had purified life. It was almost as if he were an immortal spirit, already belonging to another world, yet permitted

to revisit the old dead-and-gone love below. For such a man, and perhaps for such a man only, was such a super-mundane love as poets and idealists have imagined, all satisfying and all sweet. He was not even jealous of his happier rival; his only regret was the too evident unworthiness of that rival.

"If I had seen her married to a man I could respect; if I could know that she was completely happy; that the life before her were secure from all pain and evil, I should have nothing to regret," he told himself; but the thought of Leonard's coarse nature was a perpetual grief. "When I am lying in the long peaceful sleep, she will be miserable with that man," he thought.

One day when Jessie and he were alone together, he spoke freely of Leonard.

"I don't want to malign a man who has treated me with exceptional kindness and cordiality," he said, "above all a man whose mother I once loved, and always respected—yes, although she was hard and cruel to me—but I cannot help wishing that Christabel's husband had a more sympathetic nature. Now that my own future is reduced to a very short

span I find myself given to forecasting the future of those I——love—and it grieves me to think of Christabel in the years to come—linked with a man who has no power to appreciate or understand her—tied to the mill-wheel of domestic duty."

"Yes, it is a hard case," answered Jessie, bitterly, "one of those hard cases that so often come out of people acting for the best, as they call it. No doubt Mrs. Tregonell thought she acted for the best with regard to you and Christabel. She did not know how much selfishness—a selfish idolatry of her own cub—was at the bottom of her over-righteousness. She was a good woman—generous, benevolent—a true friend to me—yet there are times when I feel angry with her—even in her grave—for her treatment of you and Christabel. Yet she died happy in the belief in her own wisdom. She thought Christabel's marriage with Leonard ought to mean bliss for both. Because she adored her Cornish gladiator, forsooth, she must needs think every body else ought to doat upon him."

"You don't seem warmly attached to Mr. Tregonell," said Angus.

"I am not—and he knows that I am not. I never liked him, and he never liked me, and neither of us have ever pretended to like each other. We are quits, I assure you. Perhaps you think it rather horrid of me to live in a man's house—eat his bread and drink his wine—one glass of claret every day at dinner—and dislike him openly all the time. But I am here because Christabel is here—just as I would be with her in the dominions of Orcus. She is—well—almost the only creature I love in this world, and it would take a good deal more than my dislike of her husband to part us. If she had married a galley-slave I would have taken my turn at the oar."

"You are as true as steel," said Angus; "and I am glad to think Christabel has such a friend."

To all the rest of the world he spoke of her as Mrs. Tregonell, nor did he ever address her by any other name. But to Jessie Bridgeman, who had been with them in the halcyon days of their lovemaking, she was still Christabel. To Jessie, and to none other, could he speak of her with perfect freedom.

CHAPTER XI.

"WHO KNOWS NOT CIRCE?"

THE autumn days crept by, sometimes grey and sad of aspect, sometimes radiant and sunny, as if summer had risen from her grave amidst fallen leaves and faded heather. It was altogether a lovely autumn, like that beauteous season of five years ago, and Christabel and Angus wandered about the hills, and lingered by the trout stream in the warm green valley, almost as freely as they had done in the past. They were never alone—Jessie Bridgeman was always with them—very often Dopsy and Mopsy—and sometimes Mr. Tregonell with Captain Vandeleur and half a dozen dogs. One day they all went up the hill, and crossed the ploughed field to the path among the gorse and heather above Pentargon Bay—and Dopsy and Mopsy climbed crags and knolls, and screamed affrightedly, and made a large display of

boots, and were generally fascinating after their manner.

"If any place could tempt me to smoke it would be this," said Dopsy, gazing seaward. All the men except Angus were smoking. "I think it must be utterly lovely to sit dreaming over a cigarette in such a place as this."

"What would you dream about," asked Angus. "A new bonnet?"

"Don't be cynical. You think I am awfully shallow, because I am not a perambulating book-shelf like Mrs. Tregonell, who seems to have read all the books that ever were printed."

"There you are wrong. She has read a few—*non multa sed multum*—but they are the very best, and she has read them well enough to remember them," answered Angus, quietly.

"And Mop and I often read three volumes in a day, and seldom remember a line of what we read," sighed Dopsy. "Indeed, we are awfully ignorant. Of course we learnt things at school—French and German—Italian—natural history—physical geography—geology—and all the onomies. Indeed,

I shudder when I remember what a lot of learning was poured into our poor little heads, and how soon it all ran out again."

Dopsy gave her most fascinating giggle, and sat in an æsthetic attitude idly plucking up faded heather blossoms with a tightly gloved hand, and wondering whether Mr. Hamleigh noticed how small the hand was. She thought she was going straight to his heart with these naïve confessions; she had always heard that men hated learned women, and no doubt Mr. Hamleigh's habit of prosing about books with Mrs. Tregonell was merely the homage he payed to his hostess.

"You and Mrs. Tregonell are so dreadfully grave when you get together," pursued Dopsy, seeing that her companion held his peace. She had contrived to be by Mr. Hamleigh's side when he crossed the field, and had in a manner got possessed of him for the rest of the afternoon, barring some violent struggle for emancipation on his part. "I always wonder what you can find to say to each other."

"I don't think there is much cause for wonder. We have many tastes in common. We are both

fond of music—of Nature—and of books. There is a wide field for conversation."

"Why won't you talk with me of books. There are some books I adore. Let us talk about Dickens."

"With all my heart. I admire every line he wrote—I think him the greatest genius of this age. We have had great writers—great thinkers—great masters of style—but Scott and Dickens were the Creators—they made new worlds and peopled them. I am quite ready to talk about Dickens."

"I don't think I could say a single word after that outburst of yours," said Dopsy; "you go too fast for me."

He had talked eagerly, willing to talk just now even to Miss Vandeleur, trying not too vividly to remember that other day—that unforgotten hour—in which, on this spot, face to face with that ever changing, ever changeless sea, he had submitted his fate to Christabel, not daring to ask for her love, warning her rather against the misery that might come to her from loving him. And misery had come, but not as he presaged. It had come from his youthful sin, that one fatal turn upon the road

of life which he had taken so lightly, tripping with joyous companions along a path strewn with roses. He, like so many, had gathered his roses while he might, and had found that he had to bear the sting of their thorns when he must.

Leonard came up behind them as they talked, Mr. Hamleigh standing by Miss Vandeleur's side, digging his stick into the heather and staring idly at the sea.

"What are you two talking about so earnestly?" he asked; "you are always together. I begin to understand why Hamleigh is so indifferent to sport."

The remark struck Angus as strange, as well as underbred. Dopsy had contrived to inflict a good deal of her society upon him at odd times; but he had taken particular care that nothing in his bearing or discourse should compromise either himself or the young lady.

Dopsy giggled faintly, and looked modestly at the heather. It was still early in the afternoon, and the western light shone full upon a face which might have been pretty if Nature's bloom had not

long given place to the poetic pallor of the powder-puff.

"We were talking about Dickens," said Dopsy, with an elaborate air of struggling with the tumult of her feelings. "Don't you adore him?"

"If you mean the man who wrote books, I never read 'em," answered Leonard; "life isn't long enough for books that don't teach you anything. I've read pretty nearly every book that was ever written upon horses and dogs and guns, and a good many on mechanics; that's enough for me. I don't care for books that only titillate one's imagination. Why should one read books to make oneself cry and to make oneself laugh? It's as idiotic a habit as taking snuff to make oneself sneeze."

"That's rather a severe way of looking at the subject," said Angus.

"It's a practical way, that's all. My wife surfeits herself with poetry. She is stuffed with Tennyson and Browning, loaded to the very muzzle with Byron and Shelley. She reads Shakespeare as devoutly as she reads her Bible. But I don't see that

it helps to make her pleasant company for her husband or her friends. She is never so happy as when she has her nose in a book; give her a bundle of books and a candle and she would be happy in the little house on the top of Willapark."

"Not without you and her boy," said Dopsy, gushingly. "She could never exist without you two."

Mr. Tregonell lit himself another cigar, and strolled off without a word.

"He has not lovable manners, has he?" inquired Dopsy, with her childish air; "but he is so good-hearted."

"No doubt. You have known him some time, haven't you?" inquired Angus, who had been struggling with an uncomfortable yearning to kick the Squire into the Bay.

The scene offered such temptations. They were standing on the edge of the amphitheatre, the ground shelving steeply downward in front of them, rocks and water below. And to think that she—his dearest, she, all gentleness and refinement, was mated to this coarse clay! Was King Marc

such an one as this he wondered, and if he were, who could be angry with Tristan—Tristan who died longing to see his lost love—struck to death by his wife's cruel lie—Tristan whose passionate soul passed by metempsychosis into briar and leaf, and crept across the arid rock to meet and mingle with the beloved dead. Oh, how sweet and sad the old legend seemed to Angus to-day, standing above the melancholy sea, where he and she had stood folded in each other's arms in the sweet triumphant moment of love's first avowal.

Dopsy did not allow him much leisure for mournful meditation. She prattled on in that sweetly girlish manner which was meant to be all spirit and sparkle—glancing from theme to theme, like the butterfly among the flowers, and showing a level ignorance on all. Mr. Hamleigh listened with Christian resignation, and even allowed himself to be her escort home—and to seem especially attentive to her at afternoon tea: for although it may take two to make a quarrel, assuredly one, if she be but brazen enough, may make a flirtation. Dopsy felt that time was short, and that strong

measures were necessary. Mr. Hamleigh had been very polite—attentive even. Dopsy, accustomed to the free and easy manners of her brother's friends, mistook Mr. Hamleigh's natural courtesy to the sex for particular homage to the individual. But he had "said nothing," and she was no nearer the assurance of becoming Mrs. Hamleigh than she had been on the evening of his arrival. Dopsy had been fain to confess this to Mopsy in the confidence of sisterly discourse.

"It seems as if I might just as well have had a try for him myself, instead of standing out to give you a better chance," retorted Mopsy, somewhat scornfully.

"Go in and win, if you can," said Dopsy. "It won't be the first time you've tried to cut me out."

Dopsy, embittered by the sense of failure, determined on new tactics. Hitherto she had been all sparkle—now she melted into a touching sadness.

"What a delicious old room this is," she murmured, glancing round at the bookshelves and dark panelling, the high wide chimney piece with its coat-of-arms, in heraldic colours, flashing and gleaming

against a background of brown oak. "I cannot help feeling wretched at the idea that next week I shall be far away from this dear place—in dingy, dreary London. Oh, Mr. Hamleigh,"—detaining him while she selected one particular piece of sugar from the basin he was handing her—"don't you detest London?"

"Not absolutely. I have sometimes found it endurable."

"Ah, you have your clubs—just the one pleasantest street in all the great overgrown city—and that street lined with palaces, whose doors are always standing open for you. Libraries, smoking rooms, billiard-tables, perfect dinners, and all that is freshest and brightest in the way of society. I don't wonder men like London. But for women it has only two attractions—Mudie, and the shop-windows!"

"And the park—the theatres—the churches—the delight of looking at other women's gowns and bonnets. I thought that could never pall?"

"It does, though. There comes a time when one feels weary of everything," said Dopsy, pensively stirring her tea, and so fixing Mr. Hamleigh with

her conversation that he was obliged to linger—yea, even to set down his own tea-cup on an adjacent table, and to seat himself by the charmer's side.

"I thought you so delighted in the theatres," he said. "You were full of enthusiasm about the drama the night I first dined here."

"Was I?" demanded Dopsy, naïvely. "And now I feel as if I did not care a straw about all the plays that were ever acted—all the actors who ever lived. Strange, is it not, that one can change so, in one little fortnight."

"The change is an hallucination. You are fascinated by the charms of a rural life, which you have not known long enough for satiety. You will be just as fond of plays and players when you get back to London."

"Never," exclaimed Dopsy. "It is not only my taste that is changed. It is myself. I feel as if I were a new creature."

"What a blessing for yourself and society if the change were radical," said Mr. Hamleigh, within himself; and then he answered, lightly.

"Perhaps you have been attending the little chapel at Boscastle, secretly imbibing the doctrines of advanced Methodism, and this is a spiritual awakening."

"No," sighed Dopsy, shaking her head, pensively, as she gazed at her teacup. "It is an utter change. I cannot make it out. I don't think I shall ever care for gaiety—parties—theatres—dress—again."

"Oh, this must be the influence of the Methodists."

"I hate Methodists! I never spoke to one in my life. I should like to go into a convent. I should like to belong to a Protestant sisterhood, and to nurse the poor in their own houses. It would be nasty; I should catch some dreadful complaint, and die, I daresay; but it would be better than what I feel now."

And Dopsy, taking advantage of the twilight, and the fact that she and Angus were at some distance from the rest of the party, burst into tears. They were very real tears—tears of vexation, disappointment, despair; and they made Angus very uncomfortable.

"My dear Miss Vandeleur, I am so sorry to see you distressed. Is there anything on your mind?

Is there anything that I can do. Shall I fetch your sister."

"No, no," gasped Dopsy, in a choked voice. "Please don't go away. I like you to be near me."

She put out her hand—a chilly, tremulous hand, with no passion in it save the passionate pain of despair, and touched his, timidly, entreatingly, as if she were calling upon him for pity and help. She was, indeed, in her inmost heart, asking him to rescue her from the great dismal swamp of poverty and disrepute: to take her to himself, and give her a place and status among well-bred people, and make her life worth living.

This was dreadful. Angus Hamleigh, in all the variety of his experience of womankind, had never before found himself face to face with this kind of difficulty. He had not been blind to Miss Vandeleur's strenuous endeavours to charm him. He had parried those light arrows lightly: but he was painfully embarrassed by this appeal to his compassion. It was a new thing for him to sit beside a weeping woman, whom he could neither love nor

admire, but from whom he could not withhold his pity.

"I daresay her life is dismal enough," he thought, "with such a brother as Poker Vandeleur—and a father to match."

While he sat in silent embarrassment, and while Dopsy slowy dried her tears with a gaudy little coloured handkerchief, taken from a smart little breast-pocket in the tailor-gown, Mr. Tregonell sauntered across the room to the window where they sat—a Tudor window, with a deep embrasure.

"What are you two talking about in the dark?" he asked, as Dopsy confusedly shuffled the handkerchief back into the breast-pocket. "Something very sentimental, I should think, from the look of you. Poetry, I suppose."

Dopsy said not a word. She believed that Leonard meant well by her—that, if his influence could bring Mr. Hamleigh's nose to the grindstone, to the grindstone that nose would be brought. So she looked up at her brother's friend with a watery smile, and remained mute.

"We were talking about London and the theatres," answered Angus. "Not a very sentimental topic;" and then he got up and walked away with his teacup, to the table near which Christabel was sitting, in the flickering fire-light, and seated himself by her side, and began to talk to her about a box of books that had arrived from London that day—books that were familiar to him and new to her. Leonard looked after him with a scowl, safe in the shadow; while Dopsy, feeling that she had made a fool of herself, lapsed again into tears.

"I am afraid he is behaving very badly to you," said Leonard.

"Oh, no, no. But he has such strange ways. He blows hot and cold."

"In plain words, he's a heartless flirt," answered Leonard, impatiently. "He has been fooled by a pack of women—pretends to be dying of consumption—gives himself no end of airs. He has flirted outrageously with you. Has he proposed?"

"No——not exactly," faltered Dopsy.

"Some one ought to bring him to the scratch. Your brother must tackle him."

"Don't you think if—if—Jack were to say anything—were just to hint that I was being made very unhappy—that such marked attentions before all the world put me in a false position—don't you think it might do harm?"

"Quite the contrary. It would do good. No man ought to trifle with a girl's feelings in that way. No man shall be allowed to do it in my house. If Jack won't speak to him, I will."

"Oh, Mr. Vandeleur, what a noble heart you have—what a true friend you have always been to us."

"You are my friend's sister—my wife's guest. I won't see you trifled with."

"And you really think his attentions have been marked?"

"Very much marked. He shall not be permitted to amuse himself at your expense. There he sits, talking sentiment to my wife—just as he has talked sentiment to you. Why doesn't he keep on the safe side, and confine his attentions to married women?"

"You are not jealous of him?" asked Dopsy, with some alarm.

"Jealous! I! It would take a very extraordinary kind of wife, and a very extraordinary kind of admirer of that wife, to make *me* jealous."

Dopsy felt her hopes in somewise revived by Mr. Tregonell's manner of looking at things. Up to this point she had mistrusted exceedingly that the flirting was all on her side: but now Leonard most distinctly averred that Angus Hamleigh had flirted, and in a manner obvious to every one. And if Mr. Hamleigh really admired her—if he were really blowing hot and cold—inclining one day to make her his wife, and on another day disposed to let her languish and fade in South Belgravia—might not a word or two from a judicious friend turn the scale, and make her happy for life.

She went up to her room to dress in a flutter of hope and fear; so agitated, that she could scarcely manage the more delicate details of her toilet—the drapery of her skirt, the adjustment of the sunflower on her shoulder.

"How flushed and shaky you are," exclaimed Mopsy, pausing in the pencilling of an eyebrow to look at her sister. "Is the deed done? Has he popped?"

"No, he has not popped. But I think he will."

"I wish I were of your opinion. I should like a rich sister. It would be the next best thing to being well off oneself."

"You only think of his 'money,'" said Dopsy, who had really fallen in love—for only about the fifteenth time, so there was still freshness in the feeling—"I should care for him just as much if he were a pauper."

"No, you would not," said Mopsy. "I daresay you think you would, but you wouldn't. There is a glamour about money which nobody in our circumstances can resist. A man who dresses perfectly—who has never been hard up—who has always lived among elegant people—there is a style about him that goes straight to one's heart. Don't you remember how in "Peter Wilkins" there are different orders of beings—a superior class—born so, bred so—always apart and above the others. Mr. Hamleigh belongs to that higher order. If he were poor and shabby he would be a different person. You wouldn't care twopence for him."

The Rector of Trevalga and his wife dined at Mount Royal that evening, so Dopsy fell to the lot of Mr. Hamleigh, and had plenty of opportunity of carrying on the siege during dinner, while Mrs. Tregonell and the Rector, who was an enthusiastic antiquarian, talked of the latest discoveries in Druidic remains.

After dinner came the usual adjournment to billiards. The Rector and his wife stayed in the drawing-room with Christabel and Jessie. Mr. Hamleigh would have remained with them, but Leonard specially invited him to the billiard-room.

"You must have had enough Mendelssohn and Beethoven to last you for the next six months," he said. "You had better come and have a smoke with us."

"I could never have too much good music," answered Angus.

"Well, I don't suppose you'd get much to night. The Rector and my wife will talk about pots and pans all the evening, now they've once started. You may as well be sociable, for once-in-a-way, and come with us."

Such an invitation, given in heartiest tones, and with seeming frankness, could hardly be refused. So Angus went across the hall with the rest of the billiard players, to the fine old room, once a chapel, in which there was space enough for settees, and easy chairs, tea-tables, books, flowers, and dogs, without the slightest inconvenience to the players.

"You'll play, Hamleigh?" said Leonard.

"No, thanks; I'd rather sit and smoke and watch you."

"Really! Then Monty and I will play Jack and one of the girls. Billiards is the only game at which one can afford to play against relations—they can't cheat. Mopsy, will you play? Dopsy can mark."

"What a thorough good fellow he is," thought Dopsy, charmed with an arrangement which left her comparatively free for flirtation with Mr. Hamleigh, who had taken possession of Christabel's favourite seat—a low capacious basket-chair—by the wide wood fire, and had Christabel's table near him, loaded with her books, and work-basket—

those books which were all his favourites as well as hers, and which made an indissoluble link between them. What is mere blood relationship compared with the subtler tie of mutual likings and dislikings?

The men all lighted their cigarettes, and the game progressed with tolerably equal fortunes, Jack Vandeleur playing well enough to make amends for any lack of skill on the part of Mopsy, whose want of the scientific purpose and certainty which come from long experience, was as striking as her dashing and self-assured method of handling her cue, and her free use of all slang terms peculiar to the game. Dopsy oscillated between the marking-board and the fireplace—sometimes kneeling on the Persian rug to play with Randie and the other dogs, sometimes standing in a pensive attitude by the chimneypiece, talking to Angus. All traces of tears were gone. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes brightened by an artful touch of Indian ink under the lashes, her eyebrows accentuated by the same artistic treatment, her large fan held with the true Grosvenor Gallery air.

"Do you believe that peacocks' feathers are unlucky?" she asked, looking pensively at the fringe of green and azure plumage on her fan.

"I am not altogether free from superstition, but my idea of the fates has never taken that particular form. Why should the peacock be a bird of evil omen? I can believe anything bad of the screech-owl or the raven—but the harmless ornamental peacock—surely he is innocent of our woes."

"I have known the most direful calamities follow the introduction of peacocks' feathers into a drawing-room—yet they are so tempting, one can hardly live without them."

"Really! Do you know that I have found existence endurable without so much as a tuft of down from that unmelodious bird?"

"Have you never longed for its plumage to give life and colour to your rooms?—such exquisite colour—such delicious harmony—I wonder that you, who have such artistic taste, can resist the fascination."

"I hope you have not found that pretty fan the

cause of many woes?" said Mr. Hamleigh, smilingly, as the damsel posed herself in the early Italian manner, and slowly waved the bright-hued plumage.

"I cannot say that I have been altogether happy since I possessed it," answered Dopsy, with a shy downward glance, and a smothered sigh; "and yet I don't know—I have been only too happy sometimes, perhaps, and at other times deeply wretched."

"Is not that kind of variableness common to our poor human nature—independent of peacocks' feathers?"

"Not to me. I used to be the most thoughtless happy-go-lucky creature."

"Until when?"

"Till I came to Cornwall," with a faint sigh, and a sudden upward glance of a pair of blue eyes which would have been pretty, had they been only innocent of all scheming.

"Then I'm afraid this mixture of sea and mountain air does not agree with you. Too exciting for your nerves perhaps."

"I don't think it is that," with a still fainter sigh.

"Then the peacocks' feathers must be to blame. Why don't you throw your fan into the fire?"

"Not for worlds," said Dopsy.

"Why not?"

"First, because it cost a guinea," naïvely, "and then because it is associated with quite the happiest period of my life."

"You said just now you had been unhappy since you owned it."

"Only by fits and starts. Too utterly happy at other times."

"If I say another word she will dissolve into tears again," thought Angus. "I shall have to leave Mount Royal: a man in weak health is no match for a young woman of this type. She will get me into a corner and declare I have proposed to her."

He got up and went over to the table, where Mr. Montagu was just finishing the game, with a break which had left Dopsy free for flirtation during the last ten minutes.

Mr. Hamleigh played in the next game, but this hardly bettered his condition, for Dopsy now took her sister's place with the cue, and required to be instructed as to every stroke, and even to have her fingers placed in position, now and then by Angus, when the ball was under the cushion, and the stroke in any way difficult. This lengthened the game, and bored Angus exceedingly, besides making him ridiculous in the eyes of the other three men.

"I hate playing with lovers," muttered Leonard, under his breath, when Dopsy was especially worrying about the exact point at which she was to hit the ball for a particular cannon.

"Decidedly I must get away to-morrow," reflected Angus.

The game went on merrily enough, and was only just over when the stable clock struck eleven, at which hour the servants brought in a tray with a tankard of mulled claret for vice, and a siphon for virtue. The Miss Vandeleurs, after pretending to say good-night, were persuaded to sip a little of the hot spiced wine, and were half inclined to accept the cigarettes persuasively offered by Mr. Montagu;

till, warned by a wink from Jack, they drew up suddenly, declared they had been quite too awfully dissipated, that they should be too late to wish Mrs. Tregonell good-night, and skipped away.

"Awfully jolly girls, those sisters of yours," said Montagu, as he closed the door which he had opened for the damsels' exit, and strolled back to the hearth, where Angus was sitting dreamily caressing Randie—her dog! How many a happy dog has received caresses charged with the love of his mistress, such mournful kisses as Dido lavished on the young Ascanias in the dead watches of the weary night.

Jack Vandeleur and his host had begun another game, delighted at having the table to themselves.

"Yes, they're nice girls," answered Mr. Vandeleur, without looking off the table; "just the right kind of girls for a country-house: no starch, no prudishness, but as innocent as babies, and as true-hearted—well, they are all heart. I should be sorry to see anybody trifle with either of them. It would be a very serious thing for her—and it should be my business to make it serious for him."

"Great advantage for a girl to have a brother who enjoys the reputation of being a dead shot," said Mr. Montagu, "or it would be if duelling were not an exploded institution—like trial for witchcraft, and hanging for petty larceny."

"Duelling is never out of fashion, among gentlemen," answered Jack, making a cannon and going in off the red. "That makes seventeen, Monty. There are injuries which nothing but the pistol can redress, and I'm not sorry that my Red River experience has made me a pretty good shot. But I'm not half as good as Leonard. He could give me fifty in a hundred any day."

"When a man has to keep his party in butcher's meat by the use of his rifle, he'd need be a decent marksman," answered Mr. Tregonell, carelessly. "I never knew the right use of a gun till I crossed the Rockies. By-the-way, who is for woodcock shooting to-morrow? You'll come, I suppose, Jack?"

"Not to-morrow, thanks. Monty and I are going over to Bodmin to see a man hanged. We've got an order to view, as the house-agents

call it. Monty is supposed to be on the *Times*. I go for the *Western Daily Mercury*."

"What a horrid ghoulish thing to do," said Leonard.

"It's seeing life," answered Jack, shrugging his shoulders.

"I should call it the other thing. However, as crime is very rare in Cornwall, you may as well make the most of your opportunity. But it's a pity to neglect the birds. This is one of the best seasons we've had since 1860, when there was a remarkable flight of birds in the second week in October. But even that year wasn't as good as '55, when a farmer at St. Buryan killed close upon sixty birds in a week. You'll go to-morrow, I hope, Mr. Hamleigh? There's some very good ground about St. Nectan's Kieve, and it's a picturesque sort of place, that will just hit your fancy."

"I have been to the Kieve, often—yes, it is a lovely spot," answered Angus, remembering his first visit to Mount Royal, and the golden afternoons which he had spent with Christabel among the

rocks and the ferns, their low voices half drowned by the noise of the waterfall. "But I shan't be able to shoot to-morrow. I have just been making up my mind to tear myself away from Mount Royal, and I was going to ask you to let one of your grooms drive me over to Launceston in time for the mid-day train. I can get up from Plymouth by the Limited Mail."

"Why are you in such a hurry?" asked Leonard. "I thought you were rather enjoying yourself with us."

"So much so that as far as my own inclination goes there is no reason why I should not stay here for the rest of my life—only you would get tired of me—and I have promised my doctor to go southward before the frosty weather begins."

"A day or two can't make much difference."

"Not much—only when there is a disagreeable effort to be made the sooner one gets it over the better."

"I am sorry you are off so suddenly," said Leonard, going on with the game, and looking rather oddly across the table at Captain Vandeleur.

"I am more than sorry," said that gentleman, "I am surprised. But perhaps I am not altogether in the secret of your movements."

"There is no secret," said Angus.

"Isn't there? Then I'm considerably mistaken. It has looked very much lately as if there were a particular understanding between you and my elder sister; and I think, as her brother, I have some right to be let into the secret before you leave Mount Royal."

"I am sorry that either my manner, or Miss Vandeleur's, should have so far misled you," answered Angus, with freezing gravity. He pitied the sister, but felt only cold contempt for the brother. "The young lady and I have never interchanged a word which might not have been heard by everybody at Mount Royal."

"And you have had no serious intentions—you have never pretended to any serious feeling about her."

"Never. Charming as the young lady may be, I have been, and am, adamant against all such fascinations. A man who has been told that he may not

live a year is hardly in a position to make an offer of marriage. Good-night, Tregonell. I shall rely on your letting one of your men drive me to the station."

He nodded good-night to the other two men, and left the room. Randie, who loved him for the sake of old times, followed at his heels.

"There goes a cur who deserves a dose of cold lead," said Jack, looking vindictively towards the door.

"What, Randie, my wife's favourite?"

"No, the two-legged cur. Come, you two men know how outrageously that puppy has flirted with my sister."

"I know there has been—some kind of flirtation," answered Mr. Montagu, luxuriously buried in a large armchair, with his legs hanging over the arm, "and I suppose it's the man who's to blame. Of course it always is the man."

"Did you ever hear such a sneaking evasion?" demanded Jack. "Not a year to live forsooth. Why if he can't make her his wife he is bound as a gentleman to make her his widow."

"He has plenty of coin, hasn't he?" asked Montague. "Your sister has never gone for me —and I'm dreadfully soft under such treatment. When I think of the number of girls I've proposed to, and how gracefully I've always backed out of it afterwards, I really wonder at my own audacity. I never refuse to marry the lady—*pas si bête*: 'I adore you, and we'll be married to-morrow if you like,' I say. 'But you'll have to live with your papa and mamma for the first ten years. Perhaps by that time I might be able to take second-floor lodgings in Bloomsbury, and we could begin housekeeping.'"

"You're a privileged pauper," said Captain Vandeleur; "Mr. Hamleigh is quite another kind of individual—and I say that he has behaved in a dastardly manner to my elder sister. Everybody in this house thought that he was in love with her."

"You have told us so several times," answered Montagu, coolly, "and we're bound to believe you, don't you know."

"I should have thought you'd have had too much spunk to see an old friend's sister jilted in

such a barefaced way, Tregonell," said Jack Vandeleur, who had drunk just enough to make him quarrelsome.

"You don't mean to say that I'm accountable for his actions, do you?" retorted Leonard. "That's rather a large order."

"I mean to say that you asked him here—and you puffed him off as a great catch—and half turned poor little Dop's head by your talk about him. If you knew what an arrant flirt he was you oughtn't to have brought him inside your doors."

"Perhaps I didn't know anything about it," answered Leonard, with his most exasperating air.

"Then I can only say that if half I've heard is true you ought to have known all about it."

"As how?"

"Because it's common club-talk that he flirted with your wife—was engaged to her—and was thrown off by her on account of his extremely disreputable antecedents. Your mother has the sole credit of the throwing off, by-the-by."

"You had better leave my mother's name and my wife's name out of your conversation. That's

twenty-eight to me, Monty. Poker has spoiled a capital break by his d——d personality."

"I beg your pardon—Mrs. Tregonell is simply perfect, and there is no woman I more deeply honour. But still you must allow me to wonder that you ever let that man cross your threshold."

"You are welcome to go on wondering. It's a wholesome exercise for a sluggish brain."

"Game," exclaimed Mr. Montagu; and Leonard put his cue in the rack, and walked away, without another word to either of his guests.

"He's a dreadful bear," said little Monty, emptying the tankard; "but you oughtn't to have talked about the wife, Poker—that was bad form."

"Does he ever study good form when he talks of my people? He had no business to bring that fine gentleman here to flirt with my sister."

"But really now, don't you think your sister did her share of the flirting, and that she's rather an old hand at that kind of thing? I adore Dop and Mop, as I'm sure you know, and I only wish I were rich enough to back my opinion by marrying one of them—but I don't think our dear little Dopsy is

the kind of girl to break her heart about any man—more especially a sentimental duffer with hollow cheeks and a hollow cough."

"Just the kind of man to interest a warm-hearted girl. No more claret! Well, I suppose we may as well go to roost."

CHAPTER XII.

"AND TIME IS SETTING WI' ME, O."

ANGUS HAMLEIGH left the billiard players with the intention of going straight to his own room; but in the hall he encountered the Rector of Trevalga, who was just going away, very apologetic at having stayed so late, beguiled by the fascination of antiquarian talk. Christabel and Jessie had come out to the hall, to bid their old friends good-night, and thus it happened that Mr. Hamleigh went back to the drawing-room, and sat there talking till nearly midnight. They sat in front of the dying fire, talking as they had talked in days gone by—and their conversation grew sad and solemn as the hour wore on. Angus announced his intended departure, and Christabel had no word to say against his decision.

"We shall be very sorry to lose you," she said, sheltering her personality behind the plural pro-

noun, "but I think it is wise of you to waste no more time."

"I have not wasted an hour. It has been unspeakable happiness for me to be here—and I am more grateful than I can say to your husband for having brought me here—for having treated me with such frank cordiality. The time has come when I may speak very freely—yes—a man whose race is so nearly run need have no reserves of thought or feeling. I think, Mrs. Tregonell, that you and Miss Bridgeman, who knows me almost as well as you do——"

"Better, perhaps," murmured Jessie, in a scarcely audible voice.

"Must both know that my life for the last four years has been one long regret—that all my days and hours have been steeped in the bitterness of remorse. I am not going now to dispute the justice of the sentence which spoiled my life and broke my heart. I submitted without question, because I knew that the decree was wise. I had no right to offer you the ruin of a life——"

"Do not speak of that," cried Christabel, with a

stifled sob, "for pity's sake don't speak of the past: I cannot bear it."

"Then I will not say another word, except to tell you that your goodness to me in these latter days—your friendship, so frankly, so freely given—has steeped my soul in peace—has filled my mind with sweet memories which will sooth my hours of decline, when I am far from this dear house where I was once so happy. I wish I could leave some pleasant memory here when I am gone—I wish your boy had been old enough to remember me in the days to come, as one who loved him better than any one on earth could love him, after his father and mother."

Christabel answered no word. She sat with her hand before her eyes—tears streaming slowly down her cheeks—tears that were happily invisible in the faint light of the shaded lamps and the fading fire.

And then they went on to talk of life in the abstract—its difficulties—its problems—its consolations—and of death—and the dim world beyond—the unknown land of universal recompense, where the deep joys striven after here, and never attained,

are to be ours in a purer and more spiritual form —where love shall no longer walk hand in hand with pain and sorrow, dogged by the dark spectre Death.

Illness and solitude had done much to exalt and spiritualize Angus Hamleigh's mind. The religion of dogma, the strict hard-and-fast creed which was the breath of life to Leonard's mother, had never been grappled with or accepted by him—but it was in his nature to be religious. Never at his worst had he sheltered his errors under the brazen front of paganism—never had he denied the beauty of a pure and perfect life, a simple childlike faith, heroic self-abnegating love of God and man. He had admired and honoured such virtue in others, and had been sorry that Nature had cast him in a lower mould. Then had come the sentence which told him that his days here were to be of the fewest, and, without conscious effort, his thoughts had taken a more serious cast. The great problem had come nearer home to him—and he had found its only solution to be hope—hope more or less vague and dim—

more or less secure and steadfast—according to the temperament of the thinker. All metaphysical argument for or against—all theological teaching could push the thing no further. It seemed to him that it was the universal instinct of mankind to desire and hope for an imperishable life, purer, better, fairer than the life we know here—and that innate in every human breast there dwells capacity for immortality, and disbelief in extinction—and to this universal instinct he surrendered himself unreservedly, content to demand no stronger argument than that grand chapter of Corinthians which has consoled so many generations of mourners.

So now, speaking with these two women of the life to come—the fair, sweet, all-satisfying life after death—he breathed no word which the most orthodox churchman might not have approved. He spoke in the fulness of a faith which, based on instinct, and not on dogma, had ripened with the decline of all delight and interest in this lower life. He spoke as a man for whom earth's last moorings

had been loosened, whose only hopes pointed skyward.

It was while he was talking thus, with an almost passionate earnestness, and yet wholly free from all earthly passion, that Mr. Tregonell entered the room and stood by the door, contemplating the group by the hearth. The spectacle was not pleasant to a man of intensely jealous temperament, a man who had been testing and proving the wife whom he could not completely trust, whom he loved grudgingly, with a savage half-angry love.

Christabel's face, dimly lighted by the lamp on the low table near her, was turned towards the speaker, the lips parted, the large blue eyes bright with emotion. Her hands were clasped upon the elbow of the chair, and her attitude was of one who listens to words of deepest, dearest meaning; while Angus Hamleigh sat a little way off with his eyes upon her face, his whole air and expression charged with feeling. To Leonard's mind all such earnestness, all sentiment of any kind, came under one category: it all meant love-making, more or less

audacious, more or less hypocritical, dressed in modern phraseology, sophisticated, disguised, super-refined, fantastical, called one day æstheticism and peacock's feathers, another day positivism, agnosticism, Swinburne-cum-Burne-Jones-ism, but always the same thing *au fond*, and meaning war to domestic peace. There sat Jessie Bridgeman, the dragon of prudery placed within call, but was any woman safer for the presence of a duenna? was it not in the nature of such people to look on simperingly while the poison cup was being quaffed, and to declare afterwards that they had supposed the mixture perfectly harmless? No doubt, Tristan and Iseult had somebody standing by to play propriety when they drank from the fatal goblet, and bound themselves for life in the meshes of an unhappy love. No, the mere fact of Miss Bridgeman's presence was no pledge of safety.

There was no guilt in Mrs. Tregonell's countenance, assuredly, when she looked up and saw her husband standing near the door, watchful, silent, with a pre-occupied air that was strange to him.

"What is the matter, Leonard?" she asked, for his manner implied that something was amiss.

"Nothing—I—I was wondering to find you up so late—that's all."

"The Rector and his wife stayed till eleven, and we have been sitting here talking. Mr. Hamleigh means to leave us to-morrow."

"Yes, I know," answered Leonard, curtly. "Oh, by the way," turning to Angus, "there is something I want to say to you before you go to bed; something about your journey to-morrow."

"I am quite at your service."

Instead of approaching the group by the fireplace, Leonard turned and left the room, leaving Mr. Hamleigh under the necessity of following him.

"Good-night," he said, shaking hands with Christabel. "I shall not say good-bye till to-morrow. I suppose I shall not have to leave Mount Royal till eleven o'clock."

"I think not."

"Good-night, Miss Bridgeman. I shall never forget how kind you have been to me."

She looked at him earnestly, but made no reply, and in the next instant he was gone.

"What can have happened?" asked Christabel anxiously. "I am sure there is something wrong. Leonard's manner was so strange."

"Perhaps he and his dear friends have been quarrelling," Jessie answered, carelessly. "I believe Captain Vandeleur breaks out into vindictive language, sometimes, after he has taken a little too much wine: Mop told me as much in her amiable candour. And I know the Captain's glass was filled very often at dinner, for I had the honour of sitting next him."

"I hope there is nothing really wrong," said Christabel; but she could not get rid of the sense of uneasiness to which Leonard's strange manner had given rise.

She went to her boy's nursery, as she did every night, before going to bed, and said her prayers beside his pillow. She had begun this one night when the child was ill, and had never missed a night since. That quiet recess in which the little

one's cot stood was her oratory. Here, in the silence, broken only by the ticking of the clock or the fall of a cinder on the hearth, while the nurse slept near at hand, the mother prayed; and her prayers seemed to her sweeter and more efficacious here than in any other place. So soon as those childish lips could speak it would be her delight to teach her son to pray; and, in the meantime, her supplications went up to Heaven for him, from a heart that overflowed with motherly love. There had been one dismal interval of her life when she had loved no one—having really no one to love—secretly loathing her husband—not daring even to remember that other, once so fondly loved—and then, when her desolate heart seemed walled round with an icy barrier that divided it from all human feeling, God had given her this child, and lo! the ice had melted, and her re-awakened soul had kindled and glowed with warmth and gladness. It was not in Christabel's nature to love many things, or many people: rather was it natural to her to love one person intensely, as she had loved her adopted mother

in her girlhood, as she had loved Angus Hamleigh in the bloom of her womanhood, as she loved her boy now.

She was leaving the child's room, after prayers and meditations that had been somewhat longer than usual, when she heard voices, and saw Mr. Tregonell and Mr. Hamleigh by the door of the room occupied by the latter, which was at the further end of the gallery.

"You understand my plan?" said Leonard.

"Perfectly."

"It prevents all trouble, don't you see."

"Yes, I believe it may," answered Angus, and without any word of good-night he opened his door and went into his room, while Leonard turned on his heel, and strolled to his own quarters.

"Was there anything amiss between you and Mr. Hamleigh, that you parted so coldly just now?" asked Christabel, presently, when her husband came from his dressing-room into the bed-room where she sat musing by the fire.

"What, aren't you gone to bed yet!" he

exclaimed. "You seem to be possessed by a wakeful demon to-night."

"I have been in the boy's room. *Was* there anything amiss, Leonard?"

"You are monstrously anxious about it. No. What should there be amiss? You didn't expect to see us hugging each other like a couple of Frenchmen, did you?"

END OF VOL. II.

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